NATION

Silkyara tunnel rescuer's home razed, says 'got this in return'

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BUSINESS

Re-examine tax on digital good: India asks WTO

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SPORTS

Ronaldo was suspended for one match for 'provoking' fans with a gesture

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈہ روزنامہ بنگلور

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SALAR 360

Does India need UCC?

The debate about Uniform Civil Code is decades old. It was revived after Uttarakhand Assembly passed the UCC Bill on 7 February, 2024, becoming the first state post-Independence to adopt a common code for all citizens irrespective of religion. Salar News explains all you need to know about UCC

>>>More on Page 5

Karnataka passes Bill to tax rich Hindu temples

On 23 Feb, Bill was defeated in Council, where Oppn has a majority

BENGALURU, 29 FEB

v

A Bill that sought to collect funds from temples with over Rs 10 lakh annual income, which was defeated by BJP-JD(S) combine in Legislative Council last week, was taken up for reconsideration and passed by both houses of the legislature on Thursday.

Karnataka Hindu Religious Institutions and Charitable Endowments (Amendment) Bill, 2024, will now be sent to the Governor for his assent, following which it will become law.

It was defeated by a voice vote on 23 February in the upper house, where the opposition has a majority, after it was passed by the Assembly on 21 February.

The Council passed the Bill it had rejected last week amidst a din, as Opposition BJP and JD(S) members protested in the House against the government over the alleged pro-Pakistan slogans chanted in the Assembly.

BJP and the JD(S) were not present in the Assembly when the Bill was passed on Thursday, as they had staged a walkout earlier in the day **PHOTO: PTI**

BJP and the JD(S) were not present in the Assembly when the Bill was passed on Thursday, as they had staged a walkout earlier in the day, demanding the Congress' resignation for its "inaction" in nabbing the culprits who allegedly shouted the 'Pakistan zindabad' slogans after Congress member Syed Naseer Hussain was declared elected to the Rajya Sabha.

The Muzrai department's amendment bill had created a huge controversy, as it angered the opposition, especially the BJP, which claimed that the Congress government was trying to fill its "empty coffers" with temple money.

Congress then sought to turn the tables on the saffron party, pointing out that it had effected an amendment in 2011 to seek funds from high-income Hindu shrines.

The Bill among other things, proposes to collect five per cent from temples whose gross income is between Rs 10 lakh and less than Rs 1crore, and 10 per cent from temples whose income is above Rs one crore, to be put into a Common Pool Fund, administered by 'Rajya Dharmika Parishath'.

The Common Poll Fund is proposed to be used for the welfare of archakas' (priests) and the upkeep of 'C' category temples (state controlled) whose annual income is less than Rs five lakh.

The Act that was earlier amended in 2011 had made way for five per cent of the net income of temples with annual income between Rs five lakh and Rs 10 lakh, and 10 per cent of the net income of temples with annual income of over Rs 10 lakh to come into the fund.

—PTI

PHOTO: PTI

Cabinet okays ₹75K cr rooftop solar scheme

NEW DELHI, 29 FEB

The government on Thursday approved a rooftop solar scheme, PM-Surya Ghar: Mufti Bijli Yojna, with an outlay of Rs 75,021 crore, to provide up to Rs 78,000 subsidy for the installation of solar plants and 300 units free power for one crore households. Briefing media after the Union Cabinet meeting, I&B Minister Anurag Thakur informed on approval of the scheme for installing rooftop solar and providing free electricity up to 300 units every month for one crore households. The scheme provides a central financial assistance (CFA) of 60 per cent of system cost for 2 kW systems.

—PTI

Sovereign decision: MEA on denying entry to UK writer

NEW DELHI, 29 FEB

Regarding the denial of entry to Nitasha Kaul, a UK national, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Thursday said that the entry of foreign nationals into the country is a sovereign decision. During a weekly media briefing by the MEA, the official spokesperson, Randhir Jaiswal, said, "This particular UK national (Nitasha Kaul) came to India on 22 February. As you know, the entry of foreign nationals into our country is a sovereign decision..." Notably, UK-based Indian-origin academic and professor, Nitasha Kaul, claimed that she was deported from India immediately after her arrival at the Kempegowda International Airport airport.*—ANI*

B'luru to get medical, health tech excellence centre

BENGALURU, 29 FEB

State government on Thursday approved a grant for the establishment of the Centere of Excellence in Medical and Health Technology in Bengaluru, with an allocated budget of 50 crore. The initiative, spearheaded by the IT-BT department, aims at revolutionizing the healthcare sector by promoting innovation, collaboration, and policy development among startups in health care sectors which will help to mould the State for affordable healthcare treatments. The initiative seeks to transform the healthcare landscape and improve healthcare delivery for the benefit of the population.

—Salar News

BBMP Administrator Rakesh Singh and BBMP Commissioner Thushar Girinath before presenting Budget at Town Hall, in Bengaluru on Thursday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

BBMP gives ₹1,580cr for Brand Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 29 FEB

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) on Thursday presented its budget for the financial year 2024-2025 with an outlay of Rs 12,371.63 crore, of which Rs 1,580 crore was allotted to Brand Bengaluru.

To meet the outlay of Rs 12,371.63 crore, the revenue of BBMP (Rs 8,294.04 crore) and grants from Central and State governments (Rs 4,077.59 crore) will be used, said BBMP Finance Commissioner Shivanand Kalakeri in his budget speech. This year's budget is greater than last year by Rs 1,208 crore. The budget shows a surplus of Rs 2.17 crore.

Brand Bengaluru

A total of Rs 350 crore has been allotted for the proposed 250-metre sky deck in the City.

A separate ESCROW account dedicated to Brand Bengaluru projects will be started. A portion of BBMP's revenue will be redirected to this account to avoid delays.

BBMP earmarked Rs 900 crore for white-topping roads totalling 145km across the City. As an initial allotment, Rs 300 crore was released. The Urban Tunnel project will be undertaken in two highly congested areas of the City for Rs 200 crore.

Rs 130 crore was allotted for widening Kanakapura-Bannerghatta road, Hennur-Bagaluru road and Padarayanapura road in Chamarajpete and Rs 1,000 crore was allotted for waste management in the City.

—Salar News

Key highlights

- ₹350cr for 250m sky deck
- ₹1cr for day-care centres for special children of labourers
- New Indira Canteen in KIA
- Pink Rooms in malls, bus stns and restrooms for women during menstruation

Economy soars with 8.4% GDP ahead of polls

NEW DELHI, 29 FEB

India's economy grew by better-than-expected 8.4 per cent in the final three months of 2023 - the fastest pace in one-and-half years, fortifying Prime Minister Narendra Modi's record of providing a world-beating growth rate ahead of general elections.

The growth rate in October-December was higher than 7.6 per cent in the previous three years, and it helped take the estimate for the current fiscal (April 2023 to March 2024) to 7.6 per cent, according to the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on Thursday.

The estimate for 2023-24 is better than the 7.3 per cent projection made in January and exceeds by a significant margin the outlook of 6.7 per cent and 6.3 per cent made by the IMF and World Bank, respectively.

—PTI

ACCUSED RECORDED ACT

2 girls found hanging in UP, families allege gangrape

KANPUR, 29 FEB

Two girls were found hanging from a tree in a field near the brick kiln they were working in here in a village in the Ghatampur area -- days after they were allegedly raped, police said on Thursday.

Family members have alleged that the minor girls were raped a few days ago by the contractor of the brick kiln, Ramroop Nishad,48, his son Raju,18, and nephew Sanjay,19, Additional CP (law and order) Harish Chandra said. All three accused have been arrested, he said.

According to the families, the accused had also made a video of the act to blackmail the girls due to which they took the extreme step on Wednesday, Chandra said.

The victims went missing on Wednesday and hours later in the evening, their bodies were found **PHOTO: PTI**

The victims went missing on Wednesday and hours later in the evening, their bodies were found hanging from a tree, 400 metres from the brick kiln, the ACP said.

He said all three accused who are residents of Hamirpur district in UP have been arrested. "We have recovered videos and photographs of the girls from mobiles of the accused which would be sent for forensic examinations," the officer said.

—PTI

14 killed as vehicle falls in MP valley

DINDORI, 29 FEB

At least 14 people were killed and 20 others injured when a pick-up vehicle overturned and fell into a deep valley in Madhya Pradesh's Dindori district on Thursday, a police official said.

The accident took place near Badjhar Ghat at around 1.30am when the vehicle's driver lost control over the wheels while negotiating a blind turn. The vehicle then fell into a 40-50 feet deep valley.

Fourteen persons died on the spot while 20 others were injured, the official said. The deceased included seven men, six women and a minor boy, as per the police. President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed grief over the incident.

Prime Minister Modi announced an assistance of Rs 2 lakh to the kin of the deceased people and Rs 50,000 for the injured from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF).

—PTI

POACHING LIKELY CAUSE

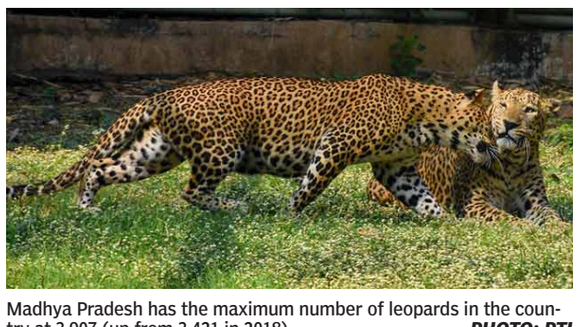
Minimal rise in India's leopard population

NEW DELHI, 29 FEB

India's estimated leopard population rose marginally from 12,852 in 2018 to 13,874 in 2022, with their numbers likely being impacted by poaching and human-wildlife conflict, according to a new report released by the Union environment ministry on Thursday.

The "Status of Leopards in India" report, launched by Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav, indicated a slight decline in the number of rosetted felines in the Shivalik hills and the Indo-Gangetic Plains.

Madhya Pradesh has the maximum number of leopards in the country at 3,907 (up from 3,421 in 2018). The number of felines grew from 1,690 in 2018 to 1,985 in 2022 in Maharashtra, from 1,783 to 1,879 in Karnataka, and from 868 to 1,070 in Tamil Nadu.



Madhya Pradesh has the maximum number of leopards in the country at 3,907 (up from 3,421 in 2018) **PHOTO: PTI**

"Central India shows a stable or slightly growing leopard population (8,820 in 2022 against 8,071 in 2018), the Shivalik hills and the Indo-Gangetic Plains experienced a decline (from 1,253 in 2018 to 1,109 in 2022)," the ministry said in a statement.

Yadav said the report emphasises conservation commitment beyond protected areas.

"Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's guidance, this conservation journey embodies the ethos of one earth, one family, and one future," he said.

The report said that the leopard population in the last four years has remained "stable", indicating "minimal growth". In comparison to tigers, the leopard population is likely being impacted by human activities in multiple-use areas.

The current trend of poaching is unknown but appears to be a likely cause of the stable population, involving commercial poaching and people's retaliation due to conflicts with leopards, it said.

The report also highlighted an increase in large carnivores and mega-herbivore-related conflicts in the Shivalik landscape in recent years.

—PTI

CID TAKES OVER PROBE

Sandeshkhali: Shahjahan held along with aide

Shahjahan Sheikh, accused of sexual violence and Sandeshkhali land grabbing, being produced at Basirhat court on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

BASIRHAT , 29FEB

Shahjahan Sheikh, accused of sexual abuse and land grab in Sandeshkhali, was suspended from his party following his arrest in the early hours of Thursday.

Sheikh was nabbed by the West Bengal police after being on the run for 55 days that witnessed violent protests, sparking a fierce political firestorm.

Sheikh was presented before the Basirhat court, which sanctioned a 10-day remand in police custody.

Additional Director-General of Police (South Bengal) Supratim Sarkar disclosed that Sheikh was apprehended from a residence in Bamanpukur, located in the Minakhan police station jurisdiction, approximately 30 km from the Sandeshkhali island in the outskirts of Sunderbans, in North 24 Parganas district. He was hiding in the company of several associates.

Another team from Basirhat Police District arrested Amir Gazi, another close associate of Sheikh, from a hideout in Rourkela in neighbouring Odisha, a senior police officer said. Acting on the mobile phone tower location of Gazi, a team of police from Barishat went to Rourkela on Wednesday night and arrested Gazi, he said. Later in the day, TMC spokesperson Derek O'Brien declared the party's decision to suspend Sheikh for six years. He was transferred to Bhabani Bhawan, the state police headquarters in Kolkata, as the Crime Investigation Department CID assumed control of the investigation. Sheikh's detention occurred within 24 hours of the Calcutta High Court's ruling that the CBI, Enforcement Directorate (ED), or the West Bengal Police possessed the authority to arrest him.

—PTI

>>>More on Page 3

'60% Kannada' signage deadline extended

BENGALURU, 29 FEB

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Thursday announced that the State government has decided to extend the deadline for 60 per cent signage in Kannada rule by two more weeks.

"Considering that it takes time to change the signage, Karnataka government has decided to extend the deadline given to commercial establishments by two more weeks so that the 60 per cent signage in Kannada rule can be followed," Shivakumar said on

"It is important that we uphold our mother tongue in utmost respect, therefore we expect this law will be duly followed, and we shall see compliance to it by the end of the 2 week extended period," he added.

The recent amendment to the Kannada Language Comprehensive Development Act 2022 applies to a wide range of establishments, including commercial, industrial, and business undertakings, trusts, counselling centres, hospitals, laboratories, amusement centres, and hotels.

Earlier, in a move that brought the Hindi vs Kannada debate back under the spotlight, the Bengaluru civic body had in December asked shops to ensure that at least 60 per cent of the content on their signboards is in Kannada.

Tushar Girinath, Chief Commissioner of Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike, had warned that commercial stores under the civic body's jurisdiction will face legal action if they do not comply by February end. This action may include fines as well as cancellation of trade licence, he had said.

—ANI

ALL IS WELL: DKS SAYS HIMACHAL CRISIS IS OVER

SHIMLA, 29 FEB

The political turmoil in Himachal Pradesh seems to be over with Congress' central observer DK Shivakumar on Thursday announcing that all differences have been ironed out. Himachal Pradesh Assembly Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania on Thursday disqualified six Congress MLAs, who had cross-voted in the Rajya Sabha polls. He also said it has been decided to form a coordination committee to sort out all internal matters. Congress observers recommended maintaining Sukhu as Chief Minister only till Lok Sabha elections as MLAs and ministers are not satisfied with him.

—PTI/ANI

>>>More on Page 3

PHOTO: PTI

VP Dhankhar to visit IIT Dharwad today

NEW DELHI, 29 FEB

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar will undertake a day-long visit to Dharwad in Karnataka on 1 March during which he will visit the Indian Institute of Technology for some inaugurations, his office said Thursday. Dhankhar will visit the permanent campus of IIT Dharwad, where he will inaugurate the main gate complex, the Knowledge Resource and Data Centre and Central Learning Theatre. He will also lay the foundation stone for the rooftop solar panel facility at the institute. He will also be the chief guest at the inaugural ceremony of the M M Joshi Eye Institute-EYESIRI, a new super-speciality eye hospital. *—PTI*

Mysuru to get State's second human milk bank

MYSURU, 29 FEB

In a significant move towards enhancing infant healthcare, Mysuru gears up to inaugurate the State's second human milk bank at Chaluvamba Maternity and Children's Hospital. The initiative aims to address the growing concern of preterm births in the district and to ensure access to vital breast milk for neonatal care. Efforts to establish the first human milk bank were initiated two years ago by the Department of Medical Education. However, logistical challenges led to the establishment of the inaugural unit at Vanivilasa Hospital in Bengaluru. Speaking to Salar News, the Medical Superintendent of Chaluvamba Hospital, Rajendra Kumar,, affirmed plans to submit a comprehensive proposal outlining project specifications and estimated budgets for official approval. The human milk bank will facilitate the collection and storage of breast milk from healthy, lactating mothers, ensuring a readily available supply for infants in need. *—Salar News*

MUDA budget promises yet to see light of day

MYSURU, 29 FEB

The proposed projects for the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA), have hit a standstill with little to no progress made on implementation. GT Dinesh Kumar, MUDA Commissioner on 13 March 2023, presented the budget of Rs 4.58 crore in a meeting chaired by the then-president Yashasvi S Somashekhar. However, the budget allocation primarily facilitated routine administrative tasks, with significant projects remaining unaddressed. Among the promised ventures, the beautification of the War Memorial near the old DC office, for which Rs 1.50 crore was allocated, remains incomplete. Similarly, the funds earmarked for the construction of commercial complexes and wastewater treatment plant development projects are yet to materialize. Additionally, the allocation of Rs 5 crore for park development lacks transparency, leaving the stakeholders unaware of any progress. *—Salar News*

Davangere admin uses tech to beat encroachment

DAVANAGERE, 29 FEB

To protect government properties from encroachment and misuse, the Davanagere district administration has now turned to the mobile-based Beat app, developed by the State government last year. Under the direction of Davanagere DC MV Venkatesh a practical survey was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the Beat application in monitoring and safeguarding government lands. app system aims to enhance surveillance and vigilance over government assets, ensuring their protection against unauthorized occupation. The geo-fencing feature of the app promptly notifies authorities of any infringements, allowing for timely intervention and corrective action. *—Salar News*

BJP says Cong giving land to minorities, dubs it 'land jihad'

CM says 7 are subjected to inquiry over the pro-Pak slogans row

BENGALURU, 29 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah replies to the Opposition during the Budget session at Vidhana Soudha; BJP and JD(S) MLAs and MLCs protest over alleged pro-Pakistan slogans raised after Rajya Sabha election results, in Bengaluru on Thursday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

The State Assembly witnessed a stormy session with BJP targeting Congress government over alleged 'land jihad" and the pro-Pakistan slogans controversy.

Leader of Opposition in Assembly R Ashoka on Thursday alleged that the government is giving the animal husbandry property worth Rs 500 crores in Bengaluru to minorities to appease them. He termed it a "big scandal" and "land jihad".

In a post on X, he said, "Siddaramaiah you dare to give 2 acres of valuable land in the heart of Bengaluru city to Muslims. What was the necessity of closing down the government veterinary clinic that treats cattle and giving it to Muslims? That clinic is not set up only for cattle. The treatment of other domestic animals was also established. We will not let the land be handed over," he posted on X.

The government on 26 February ordered the transfer of land in Chamrajpet's Chalavadipalya for the construction of residential schools.

'Seven subjected to inquiry in pro-Pak slogan

Police have subjected seven people to the inquiry over supporters of Congress leader Syed Naseer Hussain allegedly raising pro-Pakistan slogans, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said on Thursday as the BJP and JD(S) stepped up their attack on the Congress regime.

BJP demanded Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot to dismiss the government. Opposition also staged a walkout from the Assembly

Ashoka alleged that Congress has been trying to cover up the case as it has planned to tamper with the Forensic Science Laboratory investigation report.

"The government is trying to protect the desha drohis (traitors)," he said.

In the Assembly, Siddaramaiah assured that based on evidence strict action will be taken against those who chanted the slogans, and the government has no intention to protect anyone.

Union Minister Shobha Karandlaje, meanwhile, called for a centrally monitored investigation by the NIA into the alleged raising of pro-Pakistan slogans in the corridors of 'Vidhana Soudha' here.

Home Minister G Parameshwara said an investigation is on and the police are awaiting FSL.

Slogans including, 'down down Congress government, spineless government is not capable to take action, we want justice, arrest the culprit, down down government,' were raised by the BJP MLAs.

Meanwhile, BJP took out a 'Raj Bhavan Chalo' campaign under the leadership of Ashoka and submitted a memorandum to Gehlot regarding the alleged sloganeering.

Meanwhile, Congress MLA BK Hariprasad defended his 'Pakistan enemy country for BJP, not for us', statement on Thursday, saying that the BJP is playing dirty tricks.

CM rips into BJP over Budget

Amid the chaos in the Assembly, Siddaramaiah hit out at BJP for boycotting the State budget, calling it "unprecedented" and a sign of BJP's lack of commitment to the State's economy.

Siddaramaiah defended the Budget, which BJP had criticised as having "zero focus on development." He pointed out that the government had allocated a record Rs 1,20,000 crore for developmental works, and Rs 52,009 crore for the implementation of the five guarantees.

"The money being passed on to the pockets of the poor and deserving people will ultimately come back into the economy," he said.

Siddaramaiah also explained the state's contributions to central schemes, stating that Karnataka had contributed more than its share to schemes citing specific examples such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan scheme.

Although the State's contribution was only supposed to be Rs 472 crore, Karnataka had given Rs 1,528 crore. Similarly, while the Mid-day Meals Scheme required a contribution of Rs 346 crore, the State had given Rs 967 crore. In the case of Ayushman Bharat, the State gave Rs 624 crore instead of the expected Rs 124 crore. Social Security Pension share was only Rs 350 crore, but the State had given Rs 8,569 crore. Moreover, the State had provided financial support for PM Awas Yojana (Rural), with beneficiaries receiving between 1.2-2 lakhs instead of the expected Rs 48,000. In the case of PM Awas Yojana (Urban), although the central government had completed the project, the State paid Rs 5-6 lakh to every beneficiary.

He tabled a reply on the state-wise debt percentage, stating that "Karnataka has Rs 1,05,246 crore of debt while other states like Rajasthan has Rs 2,19,218, West Bengal has Rs 1,21,689, Uttar Pradesh has Rs 1,11,233 and the Central government has Rs 16,85,494 crore."

In the last decade, the Centre has increased cess and surcharge by 482 per cent. By comparing the central share of Karnataka with other states, Siddaramaiah said that Uttar Pradesh has contributed less yet got one of the highest shares of the Central government taxes, while Karnataka got only 23 per cent of the share.

Meanwhile, in order to provide social security to transport & allied sector workers, Karnataka Motor Transport and Other Allied Worker's Social Security and Welfare Bill, 2024 was passed in the Assembly. *—Salar News*

SPARKS DEBATE

Caste census report submitted to K'taka govt

BENGALURU, 29 FEB

The much awaited Socio-Economic and Education Survey report, popularly known as the "caste census", was submitted to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, by Karnataka State Commission for Backward Classes Chairman K Jayaprakash Hegde on Thursday, triggering a renewed debate within Congress which appeared divided over the issue. This comes amid objections to the report by certain sections of the society and also within the ruling Congress.

"We don't know what is in the report. The government has received the report, it will be placed before the Cabinet, and will be discussed and decided there," Siddaramaiah told reporters after receiving it. Hegde said that the report was prepared based on data collected by 1.60 lakh officials, including 1.33 lakh teachers, under the leadership of respective Deputy Commissioners of the districts across the state in 2014-15.

H Kantharaju was the Chairman when the data was collected, and he could not submit the report due to some technical issues, he said. Karnataka's two dominant communities -- Vokkaligas and Lingayats -- have expressed reservations about the survey, calling it "unscientific", and have demanded that it be rejected and a fresh survey conducted.

Asked about some Ministers making such claims, he said, "you have to ask them about it." Minister for Backward Class Development Shivaraj S Tangadagi said, there is no question of any dissatisfaction (in the government) about the report. "No one has seen the report, how can there be objections without even going through it," he asked.

However, a few Congress Ministers and MLAs, especially those from the Veerashaiva-Lingayat community, expressed their apprehensions. Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar said, during the survey many houses were not visited; also there are 103 sub-castes among Veerashaiva-Lingayats, and people have noted their castes separately during the survey and, so, there is a request for a fresh scientific survey.

Minister MB Patil said it is true that there is apprehension, especially among Veerashaiva-Lingayat community, about the caste census, as many of them have given the names of their sub-castes during the survey, and the community's demand is that all the sub-castes should be referred to as "Veerashaiva-Lingayats".

Expressing similar sentiments, Congress MLA Vinay Kulkarni said there is no objection to giving reservation based on a fresh scientific survey. With pressure mounting on his government, from a certain section, to make public the state's survey, following the Bihar government releasing findings of its caste survey recently, the Chief Minister had earlier said a decision will be taken once he receives the report.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, who is also State Congress President, and a Vokkaliga, was a signatory, along with a couple of other Ministers, to a memorandum submitted by the community to the Chief Minister, requesting that the report along with the data be rejected.

All India Veerashaiva Mahasabha, the apex body of Veerashaiva-Lingayats, which has also expressed its disapproval vis-a-vis the survey and demanded conduct of a fresh survey, is headed by veteran Congress leader and MLA Shamanuru Shivashankarappa. Several Lingayat Ministers and MLAs too have raised objections. *—PTI*

City sees traffic chaos during Anna Bhagya scheme celebrations

BENGALURU, 29 FEB

Food Minister KH Muniyappa at the celebration of Anna Bhagya scheme at Palace Grounds on Thursday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

The City witnessed traffic disruptions due to the 10th anniversary celebrations of Anna Bhagya scheme at Palace Grounds here on Thursday.

Around 1 lakh people participated in the celebrations, leading to congestion on major roads and overflowing of parking spaces.

Authorities implemented traffic diversions to manage the influx of vehicles. Public buses were diverted along Ballari Road at points like Mehkri Circle and Jayamahal Road and were asked to park at Circus Grounds near TV Tower.

Commuters relying on buses were advised to factor in potential delays and consider alternative routes if their destinations fall near the diverted paths. Parking restrictions were also in place on roads surrounding Palace Grounds, including Palace Road, MV Jayaram Road, Vasanth Nagar Road and Jayamahal Road.

Cauvery Junction underpass was closed for vehicular traffic from 7 am to 9pm, adding to the congestion on surrounding roads. Heavy goods vehicles were also prohibited from entering the city centre from 7 am to 12 pm and then again from 3 pm to 10 pm.

These vehicles were diverted at junctions, including CMTI Junction and Mysuru Bank Junction. *—Salar News*

FIGHTING FOR THEIR RIGHT

Members of Chamarajpet Residential Association protest with their pets and livestock against the closing down of the veterinary hospital at Chamarajpet, in Bengaluru, on Thursday. Chamrajapet MLA BZ Zameer Ahmed Khan reportedly said that the two acres of the hospital, belonging to the Animal Husbandry Department, will be transferred to the Minorities Welfare Department **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

College student kills aunt for Goa trip money

BENGALURU, 29 FEB

An engineering student, 20, Jashwanth Reddy, is accused of murdering his aunt Sukanya, 43, for refusing to fund his Goa trip with friends.

Reddy, a third-year B Tech student, visited his aunt on 12 February, hoping to persuade her for financial aid. According to police, he took Sukanya for a drive and requested money for the trip. When she denied having any money he asked for the gold chain she was wearing. When she refused to give it to him, the situation escalated.

According to a police report Reddy strangled Sukanya and later attempted to cover his tracks by burning the body in a secluded location near Bannerghatta. The incident came to light when Sukanya's family reported her missing. The police received information about an unidentified body discovered near Bannerghatta. After a forensic test, authorities linked the body to Sukanya and detained Reddy for questioning.

The interrogation led to Reddy confessing to the crime. Police officials expressed shock at the incident, stating that Reddy was practically raised by his aunt and uncle and enjoyed a close relationship with the couple.

—Salar News

Ex-IAS officer K Shivaram dies at 70

BENGALURU, 29 FEB

K Shivaram, Former IAS officer **PHOTO: SALAR**

K Shivaram, an IAS officer-turned-politician who is also an actor, died at a private hospital in Bengaluru at the age of 70. He was on a ventilator in the ICU and was reported critical on Wednesday and took his last breath on Thursday morning. Shivaram was the first person to clear the UPSC exam in Kannada in 1986. He retired in 2013 as Bengaluru Regional Commissioner. After his retirement, he joined the Congress party, later he switched to JD(S) to contest in Lok Sabha polls from Vijayapura and lost to BJP's Ramesh Jigajinagi. Eventually, he joined BJP and was appointed to the State Executive Committee.

He debuted as an actor with the 1993 hit "Baa Nalle Madhuchandrake" directed by Nagathihalli Chandrasekhar. After completing his education till matriculation from Government High School in Malleshwaram and a course in typing and shorthand, he secured a government job in 1972. He pursued BA and MA degrees while working through evening college and distance learning. In 1985, he passed Karnataka Administrative Service exam and was appointed as Deputy Superintendent of Police. However, in 1986 he made history by becoming the first person to clear the UPSC exam in Kannada and thus becoming an IAS officer. *—Salar News*

BOOST FOR ARTISANS

Namma Saras Mela makes a comeback

BENGALURU, 29 FEB

This year's edition boasts over 100 stalls **PHOTO: SALAR**

The annual Namma Saras Mela, a celebration of Karnataka's cultural heritage and artistic excellence, started at National College Ground in Bengaluru on Thursday.

"The Namma Saras Mela has established itself as a premier platform for our State's artisans and entrepreneurs to showcase their talent and connect with potential customers," said Skill Development Minister Sharan Prakash Patil after inaugurating the 10-day fair.

This year's edition boasts over 100 stalls, each representing the diverse craftsmanship and specialities from across the State and elsewhere. An array of handcrafted items, including intricate brassware, captivating paintings and sculptures, exquisite textiles and delicious local delicacies are on offer.

Mamuni Das, an artist who hails from West Bengal, told Salar News "Me and my family make 'mukhuts' (masks) of the folklores such as Yakshagana. It's my honour to take part in this mela and even give a souvenir (mask) to the Chief guest." Many of the participating artists credited the mela to showcase their craft. Manohar S from Bagalkot has been handmaking lamp shades for over 19 years. "This mela offers artists like me to showcase our talents. Everything from the patterns and the colours on the shades is my artwork," he said. Bharti K from Rajasthan took part in the mela to show their hand-printed and hand-embroidered shawls and blankets. *—Salar News*

CM appoints 44 heads of State boards

BENGALURU, 29 FEB

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday appointed 44 ruling Congress members as heads of various State-run boards and corporations. The postings will be for tenure of two years or until further orders, an official notification said. The names are given below:

Naga lakshmi Choudhary, Chairman of State Comission for women health; Somanna bevinamarda, Chairman, Border area development authority; Raghunandan Ramanna, Chairman of Bengaluru- Mysuru infrastructure corridor area planning Authority; Kantha Naik, Chairman of Skill Development Corporation; Vinod K Alsoty, Vice Chairman of Sports Authority; BH Harish, Chairman of State Agricultural produce and processing and export corporations; B Yogesh Babu, Chairman, Wine board; HC Sudhindra, Chairman, Coconut Development Board; Jayanna, Chairman, State Comission for SC and ST; Padmavati, Chairman, Women Development Corporation; Savitha Raghu, Chairman, Safari Karmachari Ayog; Laith Raghav, Chairman, ower factory; GS Manjunath, Vice President, labour Welfare board; Malanaryan Rao, Chairman of Karnataka fisheries development corporation pvt ltd; Altaf, Chairman of Karnataka Minorities Development Corp; Vijay K Mulgund, Chairman of Suburban Ring Road Planning Authority; Sadhu Kokila, President of Karnataka film Academy. *—Salar News*

LS polls: DMK allots two seats each to CPI, CPI(M)

CHENNAI, 29 FEB

The ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu finalised its Lok Sabha polls seat-sharing pact with the Left parties on Thursday, allotting the CPI and CPI (M) two seats each. An official release from the DMK said the seat-sharing talks were finalised today and the decision arrived upon. DMK, which leads the multi-party Secular Progressive Alliance (SPA) had earlier shared one seat each to its allies IUML and Kongu Desiya Murpokku Kazhagam (KMDK) for the polls. The two Left parties had, incidentally, contested from as many seats in the 2019 elections, and won. While the CPI (M) represents Madurai and Coimbatore, CPI has MPs from Tiruppur and Nagapattinam (SC). *—PTI*

Cops verify social media post on INLD Chief's murder

CHANDIGARH, 29 FEB

Haryana Police on Thursday said they are verifying a post on social media, purportedly by UK-based gangster Kapil Sangwan, claiming responsibility for the killing of Indian National Lok Dal's state unit chief Nafe Singh Rathee. The attack, which came ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, drew sharp reactions from the opposition parties in the BJP-ruled state. Jhajjar police said they are verifying the social media post, purportedly by Sangwan, claiming responsibility for the killing. The post also claimed that Rathee had a close friendship with Sangwan's rival gangster.Police named former BJP MLA Naresh Kaushik and others in the First Information Report (FIR) registered on Monday. It also mentioned five unnamed accused. The case was registered under various IPC sections, including 302 (murder), and the Arms Act. *—PTI*

Assam: AASU, 30 groups to launch anti-CAA protests

GUWAHATI, 29 FEB

The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and 30 other groups on Thursday announced a series of agitational programmes, including a 12-hour hunger strike in all districts on March 9 during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the state, in protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. Addressing a press conference here after a meeting with representatives of the 30 indigenous organisations, AASU President Utpal Sarma said that the announcement to frame rules and implement the CAA at a time when several cases are going on against the Act in the Supreme Court is a "grave injustice to the people"."The Assamese people have never accepted the CAA and will oppose any step towards its implementation. Along with the legal fight, we will continue democratic and peaceful agitation against the Centre's decision," he added. *—PTI*

Attempt to kill Jayarajan: Kerala HC acquits 8, convicts 1

KOCHI, 29 FEB

Kerala High Court has acquitted eight out of the nine people accused of attempting to kill CPI(M) leader P Jayarajan in 1999 in Kannur district, stating that the prosecution failed to prove their involvement in the commission of the offence. Justice P Somarajan convicted one of the nine accused for multiple offences under the IPC including attempt to murder, but reduced the sentence given to him by the trial court.The 11 January judgement of the High Court came on the appeals filed by six of the accused challenging their conviction and sentence and the state's appeal against the acquittal of three others. The verdict was made public only on Thursday; following that Jayarajan said that he feels that he has not got justice. The veteran CPI(M) leader told reporters it is his request that the state should go on appeal against the verdict.*—PTI*

Situation in Himachal fully in control, says Congress

BJP started a game of money power in HP, claims Jairam Ramesh

NEW DELHI, 29 FEB

Congress on Thursday asserted that the situation in Himachal Pradesh is "completely under control" and BJP has failed in its attempts to "destabilise the elected government" in the hill state.

Congress faces a crisis after the ruling party in the state lost the lone Rajya Sabha seat despite having the numbers due to cross-voting by some of its own MLAs, who are now siding with BJP. The six MLAS who cross-voted have been disqualified by the Speaker and are likely to challenge their disqualification from the house.

Congress General Secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh said like other states, the BJP started the game of using money power, power of the government and muscle power to destabilise the Congress government in Himachal Pradesh but has failed.

"Various things are going around in the media regarding Himachal Pradesh. But we want to say one thing very clearly. The Prime Minister and the so-called 'Chanakya' have completely failed in Himachal. After the intervention of the Congress leadership and the promptness of our observers, the situation there is completely under the control of the Congress," he said in a post on X.

Congress faces a crisis after the ruling party in the state lost the lone Rajya Sabha seat due to cross-voting **PHOTO: PTI**

- Amid the crisis, several Congress MLAs met at Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu's house on Thursday even as there are demands from a section within the Congress to replace Sukhu as the Chief M inister

"Like several other states, the BJP had started the game of money power, power of government and muscle power in Himachal Pradesh too to destabilize Congress government elected by the people with absolute majority.

"But they failed because the blessings of the people of Himachal are with the Congress. After this incident our resolve has become stronger. We will continue to serve the people of Himachal Pradesh," Congress leader said.

In a major embarrassment for Congress, BJP on Tuesday won the Rajya Sabha seat with its candidate Harsh Mahajan defeating Congress stalwart Abhishek Manu Singhvi and apparently setting the stage for a no-trust motion in the assembly.

Amid the crisis, several Congress MLAs met at Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu's house on Thursday even as there are demands from a section within the Congress to replace Sukhu as the chief minister.In the 68-member Himachal Pradesh Assembly, Congress had 40 MLAs while BJP has 25 legislators. The remaining three seats are held by independents. *—PTI*

Priyanka beat Op Lotus in HP: Sources

NEW DELHI, 29 FEB

Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra played a "pivotal" role in protecting people's mandate in Himachal Pradesh, remaining in constant touch with Congress President MallikarjunKharge, Chief Minister Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu and senior leaders to "foil" BJP's 'operation Lotus', sources said Thursday.

"The way Congress MLAs rebelled in Himachal Pradesh during the Rajya Sabha elections, it seemed that another state would be lost from the hands of Congress. But the high command of the party showed activeness and strictness, as it not only averted the crisis of rebellion but the government was also saved," a party source said.

"Priyanka immediately became active and took the lead herself along with senior party leaders. Senior leaders Bhupinder Singh Hooda, DK Shivakumar and Bhupesh Baghel were sent as observers and given strict instructions that they had to take everyone along," the source said.

Priyanka Gandhi **PHOTO: PTI**

They also conveyed the stern message that anyone rebelling or working against the party will not be tolerated.

The sources said that Priyanka remained in constant touch with the party President, the Chief Minister, ministers and all important leaders, and did not allow any laxity. "This deflated the BJP's Operation Lotus.

On the other hand, in this entire episode, the image of Himachal Chief Minister Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu w a s strengthened," the source said. *—PTI*

SANDESHKHALI ROW

HC refuses urgent hearing on WB govt's plea

KOLKATA, 29 FEB

A division bench of the Calcutta High Court on Thursday refused an urgent hearing to the West Bengal government's challenge of a single bench order vide which Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari was allowed to visit the restive Sandeshkhali. The single bench on Wednesday allowed BJP MLA Adhikari to visit Haldarpara in Jeliakhali village panchayat area of Sandeshkhali on Thursday.

The state prayed for permission of the court to file an appeal challenging the single bench order and an urgent hearing of it. The division bench presided by Chief Justice TS Sivagnanam refused to grant an urgent hearing of the prayer saying that the court has better business to do.The court said that the state can file the appeal.

West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose on Thursday welcomed the arrest of TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh in Sandeshkhali case and asserted that the time has come to put criminals, who are ruling the roost in parts of Bengal, behind bars. Absconding TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh was arrested on the early hours of Thursday from a house in Minakhan, around 30km away from the island of Sandeshkhali."This is the beginning of an end. We have to put an end to the cycle of violence in Bengal. In parts of Bengal, the goons are ruling the roost. This must end and the gangsters should be put behind bars", the governor said at a press conference here.The Left Front on Thursday staged a protest rally at Nazat in Sandeshkhali block-I against alleged atrocities on women and land grab in the restive block-II.

CPI(M) West Bengal state secretary Mohammed Salim and party central committee member Sujan Chakraborty, among other Left Front leaders, led the protest. *—PTI*

Suvendu Adhikari **PHOTO: PTI**

Akhilesh Yadav skips summons, claims CBI acts as BJP's cell

LUCKNOW, 29 FEB

Samajwadi Party Chief Akhilesh Yadav failed to appear before CBI on Thursday for questioning in an illegal mining case registered five years ago in which he is a witness, party sources said. A senior party leader said Yadav has "expressed his inability to appear before the CBI on Monday and asked the agency why it did not seek any information from him in the case for the past five years". Yadav has, however, assured all help to the CBI in the probe, the leader said.

Yadav attended a meeting of PDA -- "Picchda (backward classes), Dalit and Alpsankhyak (minorities)" -- at the Samajwadi Party office here.

Akhilesh Yadav **PHOTO: PTI**

It is alleged that public servants allowed illegal mining during 2012-16, the period when Yadav was chief minister, and illegally renewed licences despite a ban on mining by the National Green Tribunal. Reacting to the notice in the cases registered in 2019, Yadav attacked the BJP, saying, "The SP is on the maximum target (of the BJP). In 2019, I got a notice in some matters as there were Lok Sabha elections then. Now, when the election is approaching again, I am getting a notice again."Reacting to the CBI summons to him in the mining case before elections, Yadav on Thursday said they (CBI) act as a cell of the BJP.

Attacking BJP, Yadav mentioned Chandigarh mayoral poll and alleged that the BJP's "theft" and "dacoity" of votes came to the fore as election was held through ballot and CCTV was there. *—PTI*

What central schemes has TN blocked: Stalin

CHENNAI, 29 FEB

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Thursday said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi should spell out what central schemes the state government has "blocked", and said those it opposed include NEET and the CAA, keeping public welfare in mind.

He was responding to Modi's claim that there was lack of cooperation from the DMK-led government in implementing central projects in the state.Modi made these claims during his public address on Wednesday in Tirunelveli, in the southern part of the state. Stalin, on his part, referred to Modi's frequent visits to Tamil Nadu, saying "the fear of defeat on his face is evident and it manifests as anger."

"He says we are blocking projects launched by him. It would be convenient to respond if he could list out which projects he brought that we were an impediment to," Stalin said in a letter to party workers.

MK Stalin **PHOTO: PTI**

If at all the DMK was opposed to certain central initiatives, it was the National Entrance-cum-Eligibility Test (NEET) and the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, as they are against the interests of students and Sri Lankan refugees, respectively, he explained.Today, DMK has the "duty" of "defeating fascism and communalism to uphold democracy and pluralism" in the upcoming polls and to ensure the victory of the Opposition INDIA bloc, he told his party workers. *—PTI*

Central govt ignored trade union: Vijayan

T'PURAM, 29 FEB

Kerala Chief Minister PinarayiVijayan on Thursday accused the BJP-ruled Centre of not considering the views of trade unions while amending the Labour Laws.

Addressing the Chief Minister's Face-to-Face programme with workers in Kollam, Vijayan alleged that the new Labour Law amendments would undo many of the gains already made in the labour sector of the country.

"At the stage of revising the Labour laws in the country, the central government is not ready to consider the views of the trade unions or take them into confidence regarding the changes to be made. The new Labour Law amendments will undo many of the gains already made in the labour sector," he said.

Vijayan, however, hailed the coming together of trade unions against the central government's move as "encouraging," transcending politics.

He said if trade unions lose the ability to bargain for higher wages and better service conditions, wages will fall across society, increasing inequality.

He said the India Labour Bureau has pointed out that wages have been declining in the country for the past 10 years, especially in rural areas.

"In other words, the claims of GDP growth are not reflected in people's lives," Vijayan alleged.

Also, attacking Governor Arif Mohammed Khan, State Law Minister P Rajeev said on Thursday that President DroupadiMurmu's assent to the Kerala Lok Ayukta Bill, passed by the Assembly in August 2022, indicates that his stand on the matter was wrong.

His reaction comes in the wake of media reports that the President approved the amended Bill. *—PTI*

Nagaland Assembly passes 2 bills

KOHIMA, 29 FEB

Nagaland Assembly on Thursday unanimously passed two bills – enhancing salaries and allowances of legislators and also Goods and Services Tax.

Nagaland salaries, allowances and other facilities of the Chief Minister, Speaker, Deputy Chief Minister/ Ministers, Leader of Opposition, Deputy Speaker and other members of the Nagaland Legislative Assembly and pension for ex-members (Sixth Amendment) Bill, 2024 bill was introduced by Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, KG Kenye.

Nagaland Goods and Services Tax (Seventh Amendment) Bill, 2023 was introduced by Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio.

Both bills were introduced on Tuesday in the House.

Both bills were introduced on Tuesday in the House **PHOTO: ANI**

In the statement of object, Kenye said the salaries are revisable as per Section 8 of the bill and as recommended by the House Committee of the NLA. On the financial implication, he said on account of the increase in salaries, allowances and other facilities the total amount to be spent is Rs 1701.51 lakhs per year.

The Nagaland Goods and Services Tax (Eight Amendment) Bill, 2023 will make the Nagaland Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017 more comprehensive and trade-friendly, Rio said.

Speaker Sharingain Longkumer while announcing that no amendments or clarifications were sought by any of the members put both the bills to vote and the House unanimously passed by voice vote. *—PTI*

Cops file murder case 7 days after ryot's death

CHANDIGARH, 29 FEB

Seven days after the death of the farmer Shubhkaran Singh during clashes between protesting farmers and Haryana security personnel at the Khanauri border point, Punjab Police registered a case of murder on Wednesday night.

Shubhkaran,21, a native of Bathinda, was killed and 12 security personnel were injured in clashes at Khanauri on the Punjab-Haryana border on 21 February. The incident occurred when some protesting farmers were trying to head towards police barricades, put up to halt their "Delhi Chalo" march.

Farmers carry mortal remains of Shubhkaran Singh, who was killed in the ongoing 'Delhi Chalo' protest on Thursday **PHOTO: ANI**

The Punjab Police has registered a case under sections 302 (murder) and 114 (abettor present when an offence is committed) of the Indian Penal Code at the Patran Police station in Patiala.

The case has been registered against an unidentified person, according to the FIR, registered on the complaint of Shubhkaran's father. The place of occurrence has been shown at Garhi in Haryana's Jind district.

The registration of the FIR brings to an end the stalemate between the farmers and the Punjab government and paves the way for a post-mortem of the body.

Farmer leaders spearheading the march were adamant that an FIR be registered before allowing the post-mortem. The body is being kept at the mortuary of Rajindra Hospital in Patiala. *—PTI*

'PARTNERS IN MARITIME DOMAIN'

Modi and Mauritian PM jointly inaugurate new projects

NEW DELHI, 29 FEB

India and Mauritius are natural partners in the maritime domain to deal with traditional and non-traditional challenges in the Indian Ocean region, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday after virtually inaugurating a number of New Delhi-assisted development projects in the island nation.

Modi also announced that Mauritius will be the first country to join India's Jan Aushadhi scheme, an initiative rolled out to provide quality medicines at affordable prices.

At a virtual ceremony, Modi and his Mauritian Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth inaugurated several community development projects at the Agalega Island in Mauritius that were implemented with India's financial assistance.

The projects included an airstrip and a jetty.He also referred to various challenges in the Indian Ocean region."Various traditional and non-traditional challenges are emerging in the Indian Ocean region. These challenges impact our economic systems. India and Mauritius are natural partners in the maritime domain to deal with these challenges," Modisaid."We are working actively towards ensuring security, prosperity and stability in the Indian Ocean region," he said.

His comments came amid increasing concerns in New Delhi over China's growing military forays into the Indian Ocean region which is largely considered as the backyard of the Indian Navy.

Modi also said that the development partnership between India and Mauritius has been a "significant pillar" of the political relationship between the two sides.

The development projects are expected to fulfil the demand for better connectivity between mainland Mauritius and Agalega.

The inauguration of these projects came weeks after the launch of India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) systems and RuPay card services in Mauritius. *—PTI*

Narendra Modi, Mauritian counterpart Pravind Jugnauth **PHOTO: ANI**

PHOTO: PIXABAY

13-year-old ends life; parents allege bullying

THANE, 29 FEB

A 13-year-old boy has allegedly died by suicide in Bhiwandi town of the district with his parents claiming that he was facing bullying at school, police said on Thursday. The incident took place in Madhav Nagar area on Wednesday evening, an official said. Sajid S, who studied in the sixth standard at a local Madrassa school, complained to his parents on returning on Wednesday that some boys were bullying him, he said. Later, the parents found the boy hanging in his room, the police official added. Police registered a case of accidental death and sent the body for autopsy. The exact cause of suicide was yet to be ascertained and probe was underway, the official said.*—PTI*

Bay of Bengal hit with 4.2 magnitude earthquake

SAHARANPUR, 27 FEB

In a recent seismic event, the Bay of Bengal region experienced an earthquake registering a magnitude of 4.2 on the Richter scale. The National Center for Seismology (NCS) confirmed the occurrence, reporting that the seismic activity took place on 29 February, at precisely 11:23:26 Indian Standard Time (IST). In an official post on X, the official account of the National Center for Seismology, @NCS_Earthquake, succinctly captures the essential details of the seismic event. "Earthquake of Magnitude: 4.2, Occurred on 29-02-2024, 11:23:26 IST, Lat: 8.04 & Long: 89.65, Depth: 90 Km, Region: Bay of Bengal," the tweet says. *—ANI*

Recover ₹1,643 cr amid Assam bandh from agitators: DGP

GUWAHATI, 29 FEB

A day after opposition parties of Assam threatened a state-wide bandh if the Citizenship (Amendment) Act is implemented, DGP Gyanendra Pratap Singh on Thursday warned that financial losses, estimated to be Rs 1,643 crore a day due to the agitation, can be recovered from the organisers.The United Opposition Forum Assam (UOFA), formed in the state in line of Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), on Wednesday announced that a state-wide bandh will be called the very next day of the contentious Act coming into force, followed by 'gherao' of the Janata Bhawan (the secretariat) on next day.In a post on X, Singh shared two pages of a Gauhati High Court order on bandhs, pronounced in 2019, and posted his own post on the issue from June 2022.*—PTI*

SC to hear plea seeking release of detained Rohingyas

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

The Supreme Court on Thursday agreed to hear in March a plea seeking direction to the government to release Rohingya refugees who have been "illegally and arbitrarily" detained in jails and detention centres across the country. A bench of Justice BR Gavai and Justice Sandeep Mehta agreed to list the plea after advocate Prashant Bhushan mentioned the matter, saying the case has not been posted for hearing. Bhushan submitted that despite the issuance of notice to the Centre, the Union of India has not filed its reply till date. He told the court that the matter needs hearing as many Rohingyas have been languishing in different parts of the country.*—PTI*

Silkyara tunnel rescuer's home razed, says 'got this in return'

While authorities offered him a temporary stay, he refused it

NEW DELHI, 29 FEB

Hours after razing his house in a demolition drive, DDA offered to move Wakeel Hassan, a rat-hole miner who was part of the Silkyara tunnel rescue operation, and his family to a temporary accommodation but he declined the offer, sources said on Thursday.

Hassan told PTI that Delhi Development Authority (DDA) officials also told him that he would soon be provided a house in the Govindpuri area but he refused to accept the offer as it was only a "verbal assurance".

Some TV channels showed Hassan and his family sitting and having dinner amid the rubble of what used to be their home.

He spent the night on a footpath with his wife and their two children. The family's neighbours' provided them food and other necessary items.

Hassan's house was razed in a demolition drive carried out by the DDA in northeast Delhi's Khajoori Khas area. Several other houses were demolished during the drive.

Wakeel Hassan, the leader of the 12-member team of 'rat-hole' miners who rescued the 41 trapped workers from the under-construction Silkyara Bend-Barkot Tunnel *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB/PTI*

In a video message released on Wednesday, Hassan said his house had been demolished, rendering him and his family homeless.

Not long ago, the rat-hole miner was feted for his role in rescuing with his team 41 workers trapped in Uttarkashi's Silkyara tunnel in November last year.

A DDA source told PTI that agency officials met Hassan on Wednesday night.

"Some DDA officials went to the demolition site and offered to move Hassan and his family to a temporary accommodation but he refused the offer," the source said.

Meanwhile, Hassan said he wants authorities to make their offer in writing.

"Around midnight, some DDA officers came and offered to shift me and my family to a guest house in Vasant Kunj," Hassan told PTI.

He claimed the DDA officials also told him that "a house will also be provided in the Govindpuri area soon, but I refused to accept their offer because the assurance was verbal".

Hassan had alleged on Wednesday that no notice was served to him before the demolition.

"We rescued 41 people from the Silkyara tunnel and got this in return. Earlier, I had requested the authorities and the government to give this house to me but to no avail. Today, without any (prior) information, DDA (officials) came and demolished it," he had said.

The DDA had said the demolition drive was carried out on land that was "part of planned development land".

Northeast Delhi MP Manoj Tiwari on Thursday said, "When we felicitated him, he had raised this issue with me. But when we got into the matter, we found there were some issues. So, we will provide them a house legally and I can assure you that."

—PTI

'NOT ENOUGH EVIDENCE'

Abdul Karim acquitted in 1993 blasts case

JAIPUR, 29 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

A special court in Rajasthan's Ajmer Thursday acquitted Abdul Karim Tunda in the 1993 serial blasts case, observing the prosecution could not provide enough evidence to prove the charges. Two other accused -- Irfan and Hamiduddin -- have been sentenced to life imprisonment by the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) court.

The 81-year-old Tunda, a close aide of wanted terrorist Dawood Ibrahim, was accused of carrying out blasts in five trains in different cities in December 1993 to mark the first anniversary of the Babri Masjid demolition.

Two people were killed and several injured in the blasts.

"The court has acquitted Abdul Karim Tunda of all the charges framed against him. The prosecution could not provide enough evidences to prove the charges," his petitioner Shafquatullah Sultani told reporters in Ajmer.

The TADA court had framed charges against Tunda, the main accused, and "Irfan alias Pappu and Hamiduddi" on 30 September, 2021, over the blasts in passenger trains in Lucknow, Kanpur, Hyderabad, Surat and Mumbai on the intervening night of 5-6 December, 1993.

Irfan and Hamiduddin have been sentenced to life imprisonment for planting the bombs, their counsel Abdul Rashid told reporters. *—ANI*

India slams Pak for raking up Kashmir issue at UNHRC

UNITED NATIONS/ GENEVA, 29 FEB

- India has said it cannot pay any attention to a country which is soaked in red due to the bloodshed from terrorism that it sponsors around the world

In a strong retort to debt-trapped Pakistan after it raised the issue of Jammu and Kashmir at the UN Human Rights Council, India has said it cannot pay any attention to a country which is soaked in red due to the bloodshed from terrorism that it sponsors around the world.

First Secretary in the Permanent Mission of India to the UN in Geneva Anupama Singh exercised India's Right of Reply at the ongoing high-level segment of the 55th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on Wednesday.

India exercised the Right of Reply to respond to Turkiye and Pakistan after the two countries made references to Kashmir in their statements at the high-level segment.

"Firstly, we regret the comment made by Turkiye on a matter that is an internal affair of India and hope that it would refrain from making unsolicited comments on our internal matters in the future," Singh said.

Coming down heavily on Pakistan, India said that "we cannot pay any further attention to a country that speaks while being soaked in red the red of the bloodshed from the terrorism it sponsors around the world; the red of its debt-riddled national balance sheets; and the red of the shame its own people feel for their government having failed to serve their actual interests."A country that hosts and even celebrates UN Security Council sanctioned terrorists,"commenting on India whose pluralistic ethos and democratic credentials are exemplars for the world, is a contrast for everyone to see," she said, in an apparent reference to terror outfit leaders like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) founder Hafiz Saeed and Jaish-e Mohammed (JeM) chief Masood Azhar enjoying the backing of Pakistan. *—PTI*

MISSILE TEST

The annual Eastern Command Anti Tank Guided Missile field firing being conducted at Teesta Field Firing Range in West Bengal on Thursday *PHOTO: PTI*

NORTHERN RLYS SACKS LOCO PILOT FOR 'NEGLIGENCE'

NEW DELHI, 29 FEB

The Northern Railways has removed from service the loco pilot of a freight train which ran about 70 km on its own from Jammu's Kathua to Punjab's Ucchi Bassi, saying his "negligence" could have resulted in a "major incident" causing loss of lives.

A notice to this effect was issued by the senior divisional mechanical engineer (DME), the disciplinary authority in this case.

The loco pilot, Sandeep Kumar, "failed to fulfil his duties" and observe safe practice as mentioned in the railway norms. He adopted a shortcut and used improper engine stabling procedures which led to it rolling down along with 53 wagons. *—PTI*

Court acquits 7 in 2020 Delhi riots case

NEW DELHI , 29 FEB

A court has acquitted seven men accused of vandalism and burning shops and vehicles in the Dayal Pur area of northeast Delhi during riots in February 2020.

Karkardooma Court on Wednesday acquitted the accused, giving them benefit of the doubt and noting that their identity could not be established.

The court also termed the testimony of a police constable unreliable.

The court also said that even the identity of the mob behind the incidents was not established. Allegedly, there were two mobs from two communities. Additional Sessions Judge (ASJ) Pulastya Pramachala acquitted Shakil, Habib Raza, and Mohd Yamin, Usman, Shahid, Mohd Furkan and Mohd Irshad, giving them the benefit of doubt, as there were contradictions in the testimony of the complainant.

The court also raised questions over the non-examination of police witnesses. " There is no relevance of pistol and danda, allegedly recovered at the instance of accused persons, otherwise.

The recovery of Danda from an open place is otherwise also insignificant," the judge pointed out. *—PTI*

SC upholds Rajasthan's 2-child norm for govt employees

NEW DELHI, 29 FEB

The Supreme Court has upheld the two-child eligibility criterion of the Rajasthan government for seeking public employment, ruling that it is not discriminatory and does not violate the Constitution.

The Rajasthan Various Service (Amendment) Rules, 2001 bar candidates who have more than two children from seeking government jobs.

While upholding the two-child norm, the top court dismissed the appeal filed by ex-serviceman Ramji Lal Jat, who had applied for a constable's job in the Rajasthan Police on 25 May 25, 2018 after his retirement from military in 2017.

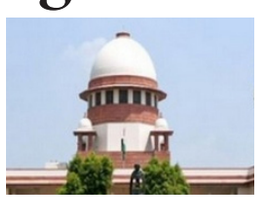


PHOTO: X

A bench headed by Justice Surya Kant held that Rule 24(4) of the Rajasthan Police Subordinate Service Rules, 1989, which says "no candidate shall be eligible for appointment to the service who has more than two children on or after 1 June , 2002" is non-discriminatory and does not violate the Constitution.

"This court held that the classification, which disqualifies candidates for having more than two living children, was non-discriminatory and intra-vires the Constitution, since the objective behind the provision was to promote family planning," the bench, also comprising Justices Dipankar Datta and KV Vishwanathan, said.Jat's candidature was rejected in light of Rule 24(4) of the Rajasthan Police Subordinate Service Rules, 1989 on the ground that since he had more than two children after 1 June, 2002, he stood disqualified for public employment under the State. *—PTI*

'No automatic vacation of stay orders of trial courts'

NEW DELHI , 29 FEB

Supreme Court on Thursday held that there cannot be an automatic vacation of stay orders granted by a lower court or High Court in civil and criminal cases after six months. A five-judge Constitution Bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud did not agree with its 2018 judgement which had held that there should be automatic vacation of stay orders of the courts below unless they are extended specifically.

Laying down guidelines, the judgement also said the Constitutional Courts, Supreme Court and the High Courts should refrain from fixing a timeline for disposal of cases and it can be done only in exceptional circumstances. The bench pronounced two separate but concurring judgements. "The constitutional courts should not lay down a timeline to decide cases since grassroot issues are known to concerned courts only and such orders can be passed in exceptional circumstances only," said Justice AS Oka. "There cannot be an automatic vacation of stay," said Justice Oka, who wrote the judgement for himself, the CJI and justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra.Justice Pankaj Mithal wrote a separate but concurring judgement in the case. *—PTI*

TALES OF HORROR

NCR sees four crimes in just two days

NOIDA,29 FEB

In another series of crimes in NCR, a 20-year-old BBA student in Greater Noida was allegedly strangled to death by four friends after an argument broke out and buried his body six feet deep inside a farmland in Amroha, police officials said on Thursday. Three of the accused were arrested on Wednesday evening after a gunfight with the police in Greater Noida in which the trio suffered gunshot injuries on their legs, officials said.

"On 27 February, police received information that Bennett University student Yash Mittal had not returned to the hostel since 26 February. When CCTV footage was reviewed, it was found that he left the university campus safely in a car while talking to someone on the phone," Khan said. Also, three youths stabbed a 15-year-old boy to death in a park in west Delhi after an altercation between them, police said on Thursday.

In one of the murders, a BBA student was killed by buried by his 'friends' *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

The murder happened on Tuesday in Harit Park in the Inderpuri area. The accused, all minors, fled the scene after the incident, a senior police officer said. The injured boy was admitted to Kapoor Medical Centre, Naraina, where doctors declared him brought dead, the officer said.

- 3 of the accused were arrested on Wednesday evening after a gunfight with the police in Greater Noida where the trio suffered gunshot

"The victim had sustained injuries on his chest and abdomen," the official said. A 32-year-old Delhi woman missing since 23 February was allegedly strangled by her business partner, who is also suspected to have committed suicide in Haryana's Sonipat, the city police said on Wednesday.

The woman's body was found on Wednesday at a Narela playschool that she was planning to open with her business partner Sohan Lal, they said.

According to a complaint lodged by Swatantra Nagar resident Vijay Kumar at Narela police station on 24 February, his daughter left home on 23 February on a two-wheeler and did not return.

In Rohini Sector 20, two assailants opened fire at a jewellery shop here after a failed attempt to break into it, police said on Thursday.

"A team immediately reached the spot and examined the scene of the crime. The complainant said two unknown men tried to open the door of his shop, and when they failed, one of them fired at the window and fled," a senior police officer said. *—PTI*

New sea slug species named after President

BERHAMPUR, 29 FEB

PHOTO: X

Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) scientists have discovered a new species of head-shield sea slug from Bay of Bengal in the Odisha-West Bengal border and named it in the honour of President Droupadi Murmu, an official said.

The new species which was discovered from Udaipur and Digha coast of Odisha and West Bengal and named as "Melanochlamys Droupadi", said zDhriti Banerjee, Director, ZSI.

The proposed common name of the new species is Droupadi's head-shield sea slug, said one of the scientists.

The species was confirmed by examination of morphological, anatomical and molecular characteristics.

It is a small invertebrate with a maximum length up to 7 mm, brownish black in colour with a ruby red spot in the hind end, shell inside the body, hermaphrodite, normally crawling on the intertidal zone, which left the crawl mark behind them in the sandy beaches.

Their reproduction apparently occurs between November and January, said Prasad Chandra Tudu, Marine Aquarium Regional Centre, ZSI, Digha. *—PTI*

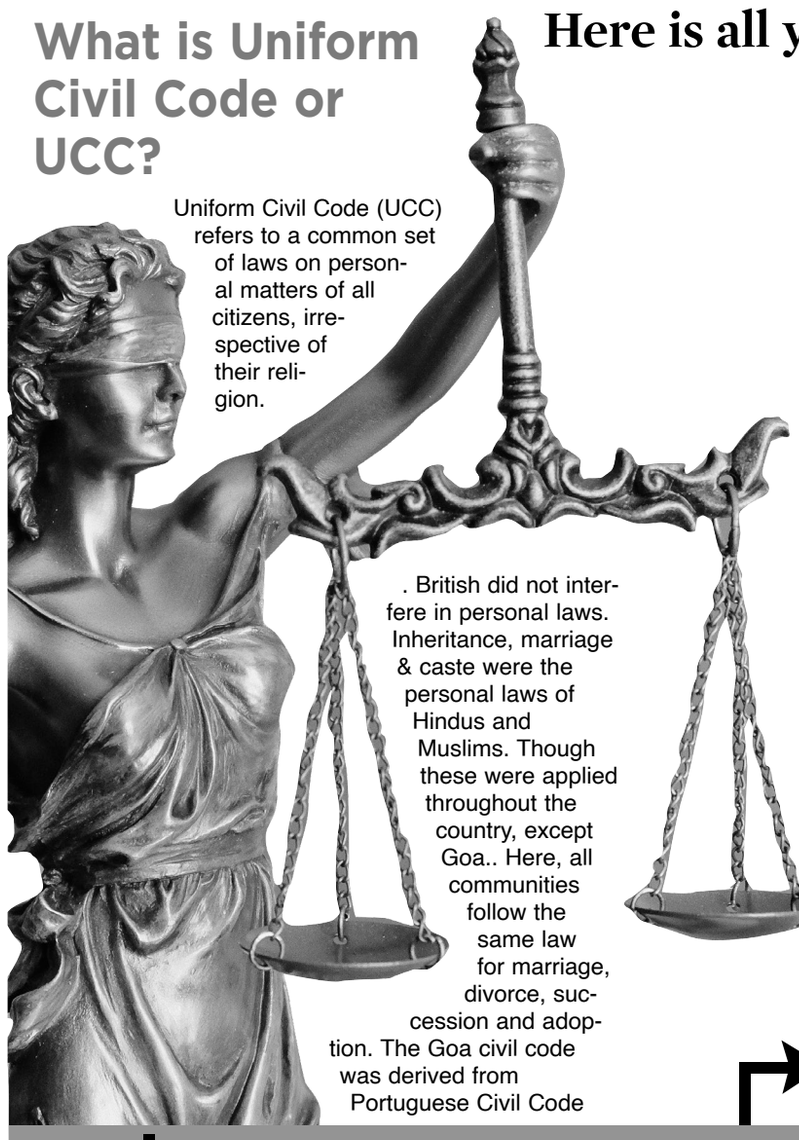
SALAR 360
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU
SALAR | FRIDAY | 1 MARCH 2024

DOES INDIA NEED UCC?

Here is all you need to know about Uniform Civil Code

What is Uniform Civil Code or UCC?

Uniform Civil Code (UCC) refers to a common set of laws on personal matters of all citizens, irrespective of their religion.

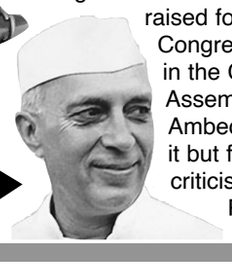


. British did not interfere in personal laws. Inheritance, marriage & caste were the personal laws of Hindus and Muslims. Though these were applied throughout the country, except Goa.. Here, all communities follow the same law for marriage, divorce, succession and adoption. The Goa civil code was derived from Portuguese Civil Code

Dr BR Ambedkar chairs a discussion on Hindu Code Bill in New Delhi — Source: Ministry of External Affairs

Nehru & Ambedkar backed UCC

Prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru wanted a Uniform Civil Code for India. Nehru believed state must be governed by legislation, not religion. On 23 November, 1948, UCC was raised for first time by Congress' Minoo Masani in the Constituent Assembly. Dr BR Ambedkar too backed it but faced severe criticism in the Parliament



Constitution

This is when Article 44 was included in Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) under Part IV of the Constitution (Article 36–51). These aim at ensuring socio-economic justice. Article 44 states: "The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India." While citizens can be encouraged to follow them, they are not mandatory. Directive Principles are not "enforceable" in a court of law

Govt then passed Hindu code bills but faced criticism over rules on monogamy, inheritance to daughters. Thus, a lesser version of this bill was passed by Parliament in 1956, in the form of four separate acts:

- **Hindu Marriage Act, 1955:** A marriage is valid when bridegroom is 21 years and bride 18. A marriage can be annulled due to impotency or inability to consummate
- **Hindu Succession Act, 1956:** If a widow re-marries, she won't inherit property. In religious conversion, children and descendants can't inherit
- **Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956:** Adoptive father or mother cannot cancel adoption and the child cannot renounce the adopted status
- **Special Marriage Act, 1954:** It allows marriage of people from different religions or castes. These laws apply to Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs. Muslims, Christians and Parsis are excluded

MUSLIM PERSONAL LAW (SHARIAT):

- This law deals with marriage, succession, inheritance and charities among Muslims except those in Jammu and Kashmir
- Inheritance comes after death of a person. A childless Muslim widow is entitled to one-fourth of the property of the deceased husband. However, a widow who has children or grandchildren is entitled to one-eighth of the deceased husband's property
- A husband may divorce his wife without reason. A wife can divorce the husband only when the husband has delegated such a right to her

CHRISTIAN PERSONAL LAW:

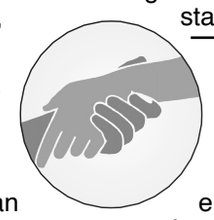
- Marriages of Indian Christians are regulated by Indian Christian Marriage Act, 1872. These laws are not applicable in Goa.

PARSI MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE ACT (1936):

- Parsi woman who marries outside her religion loses all her rights to Parsi rituals. There is no provision for adoption by Parsis. If a Parsi woman marries outside her religion, her children are not entitled to inherit

Arguments for UCC

- UCC can eradicate discriminatory practices related to marriage, divorce, inheritance
- It will strengthen idea of a unified Indian identity
- It will remove patriarchal notions of society in all religions
- It would bring India's legal system in line with global standards
- It will simplify complex legal matters governed by different personal laws. It will help in speedy disposal of cases
- UCC would promote gender equality



> **Now look at the disadvantages that you will perpetuate if there is no Civil Code. Take, for instance, the Hindus. We have the law of Mayukha applying in some parts of India; we have Mithakshara in others; and we have the law-Dayabagha in Bengal. In this way, even the Hindus themselves have separate laws and most of our Provinces and States have started making separate Hindu laws for themselves. It is therefore not merely a question for minorities but it also affects the majority**
>
> KM Munshi, former governor of Uttar Pradesh

Arguments against UCC

- Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and Dalits opposed the UCC and dubbed it a 'Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan' project
- Muslims flagged the potential erosion of religious autonomy and minority rights
- Rashtriya Adivasi Ekta Parishad, a tribal group, said Uniform Civil Code will impact their customs such as polygamy and polyandry
- It violates Article 25, which gives freedom to practise religion
- It violates Article 29, right to have distinct culture. For eg in Nagaland and Mizoram
- It allegedly Hinduises all laws
- Many legal pundits argue that 'One nation, one law', doesn't work for India as different states have different criminal and civil laws. For eg, laws of anticipatory bail

Landmark cases

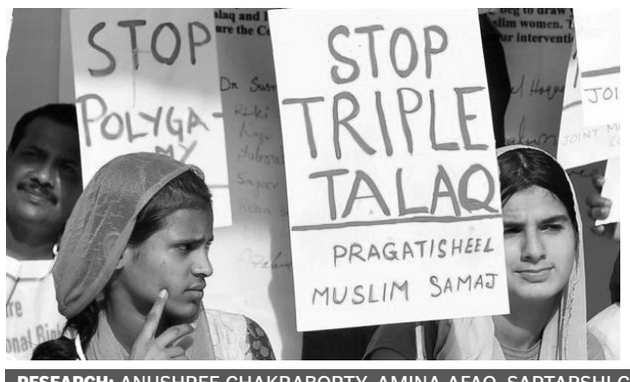
Shah Bano (1985)

Shah Bano, 73, was denied maintenance after her husband of 40 years divorced her using triple talaq. She moved court. SC ruled in her favour under the "maintenance of wives, children and parents" provision of Section 125 of the Criminal Code, which applied to all citizens irrespective of religion. Bano got an alimony of Rs 179.20. SC recommended that UCC be set up. However, fearing poll defeat, Rajiv Gandhi govt passed 'The Muslim Women's (Right to Protection on Divorce) Act' in 1986, which made Sec 125 of the Criminal Code inapplicable to Muslim women, reversing SC verdict

Sarla Mudgal vs Union of India (1995)

SC ruled that a Hindu husband, upon converting to Islam, cannot enter into a second marriage without dissolving his first. SC held that the Hindu marriage can only be dissolved under the Hindu Marriage Act 1955. It ruled that a 2nd marriage solemnised after converting to Islam would be an offence under Section 494 of IPC. The verdict discussed the issue of bigamy as SC again pressed for UCC

Triple Talaq case (2017)



Domestic violence survivor Shayara Bano was divorced by her husband through triple talaq. She approached SC in 2016 saying triple talaq violated Right to Equality, Right against Discrimination, and Right to Livelihood. In 2017, SC in 3:2 verdict declared triple talaq unconstitutional, holding that it violates Fundamental Rights. Parliament on 30 July, 2019, passed Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2019, and declared triple talaq illegal, and made it a punishable act

RESEARCH: ANUSHREE CHAKRABORTY, AMINA AFAQ, SAPTARSHI CHAKRABORTY, SHRESHTHA DUTTA, AARATI KRISHNA, SUBHALAKSHMI PR; **GRAPHICS:** KISHORE BABU

BJP's tryst with UCC

- When Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the pre-Emergency avatar of BJP, was born on 21 October, 1951, nearly 200 delegates adopted resolution on UCC
- BJP's call for UCC turned stronger in 1985 after Shah Bano case
- BJP promised UCC in 1967, 1971, 1991, 1998, 2004 and 2019 LS polls manifestos
- After NDA coalition in 1998, BJP kept away from issues such as UCC
- In 2009, UCC became BJP's major agenda after LK Advani became PM candidate
- After Modi govt won 2019 polls, it introduced the Bill in Parliament for the first time in November
- But it was withdrawn to make certain amendments due to its differences with the RSS
- In 2022, U'khand CM vowed to implement UCC after winning Assembly polls

Marriage to live-in: U'khand UCC rules for all

Uttarakhand is 1st state post-Independence to impose UCC. It proposes common laws on marriage, divorce, land and inheritance, excluding Schedule Tribes. Here is what the Bill has:

Rules for marriage made stricter

- Minimum age **Men:** 21 yrs **Women:** 18 yrs *Violation will lead to 8 months' jail. Polygamy, bigamy are prohibited*
- Nikah (Muslim marriage), Saptpadi (Hindu), Anand Karaj (Sikh) and other religious marriages recognised
- Marriages must be registered in 60 days
- Within 15 days, sub-registrar will issue certificate or inform why registration was rejected
- Rs 10K fine for non-registration of marriage
- 3-month jail + Rs 25,000 fine for false information during registration
- Marriages after 26 March, 2010, must be registered in 6 months or face Rs 20,000 fine

Marriage voidable if:

- Not been consummated owing to impotence
- Husband impregnates another woman
- Woman was pregnant with another man's child
- Either party was coerced into marriage

Live-in recognised but privacy lost

- Live-in relationship must be registered with govt
- Couples who fail to do so may attract jail terms for 3 months
- Children from live-in relationships to be considered legitimate
- If any partner is under 21, parent nod is must
- Partners may terminate live-in by submitting statements to registrar
- Women deserted in live-in entitled to maintenance, may approach court

In a first, all get equal inheritance

- Spouse, children, parents have equal property rights
- If no immediate family member, property will be divided among 1st paternal cousins
- Illegitimate and adopted children, kids via surrogacy get equal share
- Bill abolishes system under which 4 generations of Hindus inherit ancestral property

- Wills take precedence over rights of all other inheritors

Equal divorce rights

- No marriage can be dissolved without court order, outlawing "talaqs" in Islam. 3-year jail for violation of this rule
- Wife can seek divorce if husband has more than 1 wife, and is guilty of rape or unnatural sex
- Marriage can be dissolved for cruelty, adultery, desertion and religious conversion
- Couple can't move court for divorce in less than 1 year of marriage
- Muslim practice of Halala banned. Halala is when a divorced woman remarries
- Both men and women entitled for alimony
- A partner can file for divorce if partner has STDs
- Mother custodian of kids below 5 yrs

Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhami ***PHOTO: PTI***

Silent on guardianship, adoption

No new laws on guardianship and adoption. Consequently, under old Bill, father will be child's guardian and mother custodian. Citizens can adopt under Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act (HAMA), 1956, and Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act, 2015

Assam, Gujarat have proposed to introduce a Bill seeking a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) after Uttarakhand. This may exempt the tribal communities. According to Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, the Assam model will fight against child marriage and polygamy

Farmers rally around Wales in protest over environmental rules

LONDON, 28 FEB

Tractors lined a road in the Welsh capital on Wednesday as thousands of farmers and their supporters thronged the parliament to protest proposed environmental protections that would be required to receive subsidies. Protesters held signs reading, "No Farmers, No Food", and "We Will Not Be Mooooved!" as leaders said some 5,500 farmworkers would lose their livelihoods if regulations are passed that would require them to plant trees on 10 per cent of their land and create wildlife habitat on another 10 per cent. "I've got a two-year-old son sitting at home who loves every minute of being on the farm, and I am fighting for his future on that farm," said Ioan Humphreys, a fifth-generation farmer. *—AP*

France OKs bill to make abortion a constitutional right

PARIS, 28 FEB

France's Senate on Wednesday adopted a bill meant to enshrine a woman's right to an abortion in the French Constitution, clearing a major hurdle for the legislation. The measure was promised by President Emmanuel Macron following a rollback of abortion rights in court rulings in the United States. Wednesday's vote came after the lower house, the National Assembly, overwhelmingly approved the proposal in January. The measure now goes before a joint session of parliament for its expected approval by a three-fifths majority. Macron's government wants Article 34 of the constitution amended to specify that "the law determines the conditions by which is exercised the freedom of women to have recourse to an abortion, which is guaranteed". *—AP*

PHOTO: THERICHARDLEWIS

Comedian Richard Lewis dies at 76

LOS ANGELES, 29 FEB

Comedian and actor Richard Lewis has died, according to his publicist, Jeff Abraham. He was 76. Abraham told CNN in an email that the entertainer died 'peacefully' at his Los Angeles home on Tuesday night after suffering a heart attack. In April 2023, Richard stated that he had Parkinson's disease. Lewis, known as a comic's comic, made his debut appearance on 'The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson' in 1974 and quickly rose to prominence in the late-night comedy scene. On-screen, Lewis has played himself for years on 'Curb Your Enthusiasm' opposite his friend Larry David, at one point joking during an episode this season about which one of them looked worse. *—ANI*

Private US moon lander still working but not for long

CAPE CANAVERAL, 29 FEB

The first US spacecraft to land on the moon since the Apollo era was still working Wednesday but not for long, company officials said. Intuitive Machines, the company that built the lander, released new photos that showed at least one broken leg on the six-legged spacecraft. The lander came in too fast, skidded and tumbled over as it touched down near the moon's south pole last Thursday, hampering communications and power. CEO Steve Altemus said the lander, named Odysseus, was still generating solar power Wednesday even though it was on its side. He said flight controllers would put the craft to "sleep" later Wednesday, then see if it can be awakened in three weeks, once lunar night ends. A Wednesday night shutdown would be an early end for the second mission under NASA's commercial program for lunar deliveries but it far outpaced a rival's failed effort last month; that lander had a fuel leak and came crashing back to Earth. *—AP*

Israeli fire kills 104 waiting for aid: Gaza

Israeli air strikes and shelling have killed at least 30 people in three separate attacks

RAFAH, 28 FEB

Health authorities in Gaza said on Thursday Israeli fire on people waiting for aid near Gaza City had killed 104 Palestinians and wounded 280, with one hospital saying it had received 10 bodies and dozens of injured patients.

Footage aired by Al Jazeera Arabic shows the moment in which the Israeli army opened fire on a crowd of people as aid was being delivered on al-Rashid Street.

The first shots were fired at about 4:30am (02:30GMT), as hundreds of Palestinians gathered at a major roundabout south of Gaza City.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' office said he "condemned the ugly massacre conducted by the Israeli occupation army this morning against the people who waited for the aid trucks at the Nabulsi roundabout".

Gaza Health Ministry spokesperson Ashraf al-Qidra said the incident took place at al-Nabusi roundabout west of Gaza City in the northern part of the enclave.

Aid convoys carrying food reached northern Gaza this week, Israeli officials said on Wednesday, the first major delivery in a month to the devastated, isolated area, where the UN has warned of worsening starvation among hundreds of thousands of Palestinians amid Israel's offensive.

The first shots were fired at about 4:30am (02:30GMT), as hundreds of Palestinians gathered at a major roundabout south of Gaza City ***PHOTO: AL JAZEERA ARABIC SCREENGRAB***

The increasing alarm over hunger across Gaza has fuelled international calls for a cease-fire as the US, Egypt and Qatar work to secure a deal between Israel and Hamas for a pause in fighting and the release of some of the hostages seized by Hamas in its 7 October attack.

Mediators hope to reach an agreement before the Muslim holy month of Ramadan starts around 10 March. But so far, Israel and Hamas have remained far apart in public on their demands.

Increasing the pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to reach a deal, families of hostages on Wednesday launched a four-day march from southern Israel to Jerusalem to demand their loved ones be set free. Some of the around 100 hostages freed during a cease-fire in late November are joining the march, which is to end near Netanyahu's official residence. The plight of the hostages has deeply shaken Israelis, who see in them an enduring symbol of the state's failure to protect its citizens from Hamas' assault. In its 7 October attack, the Palestinian militant group abducted roughly 250 people, according to Israeli authorities, including men, women, children and older adults. *—PTI*

Gaza death toll exceeds 30,000: Health Min

GAZA CITY, 29 FEB

More than 30,000 Palestinians have now been killed in Gaza since 7 October, the Hamas-run health ministry says. That number equates to about 1.3% of the 2.3 million population of the territory - the latest grim marker of the awful toll of this war. The ministry says that the majority of those killed were women and children. Its figures do not differentiate between civilians and fighters when identifying those killed. In its daily update on Thursday, the ministry said 81 people had been killed in the last 24 hours, bringing the total to 30,035. The actual number of dead is likely to be far higher as the count does not include those who have not reached hospitals, among them thousands of people still lost under the rubble of buildings hit by Israeli air strikes. More than 70,000 injured people have been registered by the Gaza ministry of health, which is the only official source for casualties. Its data is quoted by UN agencies and other international institutions. *—BBC News*

Working to airdrop aid to Gaza Strip: Canada

OTTAWA, 29 FEB

Canada is working to airdrop humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip as soon as possible, a cabinet minister said on Wednesday. The confirmation that an active effort is underway comes after Canadian International Development Minister Ahmed Hussen said Ottawa was exploring new options to deliver aid. He said the provision of airdrops in partnership with like-minded countries in the region, such as Jordan, was on the table. Hussen said last week that the provision of aid is nowhere near what's needed and a tedious inspection process was slowing down the movement of supplies brought in by truck. He made the comments following a trip to the Rafah border crossing, the only way in or out of the Gaza Strip since the Israel-Hamas war began in October. *—PTI*

Doing all to improve H-1b visa process: US

WASHINGTON, 29 FEB

The US immigration agency has announced the launch of a system that will allow multiple people within an organisation, as well as their legal representatives, to collaborate on and prepare H-1B registrations, and H-1B petitions. The US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in a statement on Wednesday announced the launch of myUSCIS organisational accounts. The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.

Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. The primary purpose of 'Form I-907' is to request Premium Processing Service on certain petitions or applications designated as eligible for premium processing. DHS uses the information to grant or deny the immigration benefit one is seeking.

The USCIS in a statement on Wednesday announced the launch of myUSCIS organisational accounts ***PHOTO: PTI***

The organisational accounts that will allow multiple people within an organisation, as well as their legal representatives, to collaborate on and prepare H-1B registrations, H-1B petitions and any associated Form I-907, Request for Premium Processing Service, USCIS said in a statement on Wednesday.

A new organisational account is required to participate in the H-1B Electronic Registration Process starting in March 2024, the USCIS said. "We are working expeditiously to address any technical issues that may arise for legal representatives whose accounts migrated when they logged into their online account on or after February 14, 2024, including impacts on cases other than H-1B filings," it said.

The initial registration period for FY 2025 H-1B cap will open at noon Eastern on March 6, and run through noon Eastern on March 22. During this period, prospective petitioners and their representatives, if applicable, must use a USCIS online account to register each beneficiary electronically for the selection process and pay the associated registration fee for each beneficiary, its media alert said. *—PTI*

TRUMP'S CIVIL FRAUD CASE

White powder sent to judge, adding scares

Judge who ordered former US president Donald Trump to pay a $454 million civil fraud judgment ***PHOTO: PTI***

NEW YORK, 29 FEB

White powder was found on Wednesday in an envelope addressed to the New York judge who ordered former US president Donald Trump to pay a $454 million civil fraud judgment.

It's the latest security scare involving people in key roles in the former president's legal cases. A court officer screening mail at Judge Arthur Engoron's Manhattan courthouse opened the envelope around 9.30 am. Some of the powder fell out of the envelope and landed on the officer's pants, police said.

Preliminary tests were negative for hazardous substances, court spokesperson Al Baker said. The courthouse operations office where the mail was opened was briefly closed, but the courthouse remained open. The officer and other workers who may have been exposed to the powder were temporarily isolated, Baker said. No injuries were reported. Engoron had no exposure to the letter or the powdery substance, Baker said. Wednesday's scare came less than two weeks after Engoron issued his verdict penalising Trump, his company and executives, including his two sons Eric and Donald Trump Jr, for scheming to dupe banks, insurers and others by inflating his wealth on financial statements used to secure loans and make deals. Along with staggering financial penalties, the judge's ruling forced a shakeup at the top of Trump's company, putting the Trump Organisation under court supervision and imposing strict restrictions on how it does business. *—AP*

- Preliminary tests were negative for hazardous substances, court spokesperson Al Baker said. The courthouse operations office where the mail was opened was briefly closed, but the courthouse remained open

Biden 'continues to be fit for duty': Doctors

WASHINGTON, 29 FEB

Joe Biden "continues to be fit for duty" and "fully executes" all of his responsibilities, his physician has said after an annual health checkup, asserting that the 81-year-old US President does not have any major health concerns.

The White House on Wednesday shared a memo with President Biden's "current health summary" following his annual routine physical at Walter Reed National Military Medical Centre. Biden, whose health has been under scrutiny ahead of November's presidential election, underwent the assessment on Wednesday.

"He continues to be fit for duty and fully executes all of his responsibilities without any exemptions or accommodations," Dr Kevin O'Connor, physician to the US President, wrote in a memo shared with reporters. *—PTI*

Pak's Assembly to hold inaugural session

ISLAMABAD, 29 FEB

Pakistan's newly-elected Parliament will meet on Thursday for its maiden session as President Dr Arif Alvi finally summoned the Assembly after differing with the caretaker government over the issue of former prime minister Imran Khan's party-backed candidates being allotted the reserved seats.

Alvi approved a move from the caretaker parliamentary affairs ministry to summon the newly-elected National Assembly's first session on February 29, according to a statement posted by the president's X account.

"Subject to some reservations, President Dr Arif Alvi has summoned to convene the National Assembly on 29 February in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 54(1) of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan," the statement said.

The President accorded his approval keeping in view "the mandate and implications of the timeline given in Article 91 (2) and subject to some reservations and expecting the resolution of the issue of the reserved seats before the 21st day [after the general elections]." The late-night statement also took issue with the tone of the summary sent to Alvi by the caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, adding that the president was calling the session as he expected that the issue of reserved seats would be settled by the 21st day after the polls, as envisaged in the law.

According to constitutional provisions, the meeting of the National Assembly must be convened within 21 days of poll, and 29 February is the mandated date under Article 91. *—PTI*

Taiwan detects 19 Chinese military aircraft

TAIPEI, 29 FEB

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence (MND) has detected 19 Chinese military aircraft and seven naval vessels around the country during the last 24 hours until 6 am (local time) on Thursday.

According to Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence, among the 19 Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) aircraft, 12 crossed the Taiwan Strait median line. After China's action, Taiwan sent aircraft and naval ships and deployed air defence missile systems to track the activities of the People's Liberation Army, Taiwan News reported.

MND stated, "19 PLA aircraft and 7 PLAN vessels operating around Taiwan were detected up until 6 am (UTC+8) on Thursday. 12 of the aircraft crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait and entered Taiwan's northern, southwestern, and eastern ADIZ. ROC Armed Forces have monitored the situation and employed CAP aircraft, Navy vessels, and coastal missile systems in response to the detected activities."

So far in February, Taiwan has detected Chinese military aircraft 253 times and naval ships 150 times, according to a Taiwan News report.

Gray zone tactics have been described as "effort or series of efforts beyond steady-state deterrence and assurance that attempt to achieve one's security objectives without resorting to direct and sizable use of force," Taiwan News reported.

On 14 February, the US nominee to helm US Indo-Pacific Command, Admiral Samuel Paparo, warned that China could soon have the capability to use military exercises to conceal an invasion of Taiwan, Taiwan News reported. *—ANI*

THOMAS CREECH

Idaho execution delayed after failed lethal injection

KUNA, 29 FEB

Idaho halted the execution of serial killer Thomas Eugene Creech on Wednesday after medical team members repeatedly failed to find a vein where they could establish an intravenous line to carry out the lethal injection.

Creech, 73, has been in prison half a century, convicted of five murders in three states and suspected of several more. He was already serving a life term when he beat a fellow inmate, 22-year-old David Dale Jensen, to death in 1981 — the crime for which he was to be executed.

Creech, one of the longest-serving death row inmates in the US, was wheeled into the execution chamber at the Idaho Maximum Security Institution on a gurney at 10 am.

xxx ***PHOTO: KCCINEWS***

Three medical team members tried eight times to establish an IV, Department of Correction Director Josh Tewalt told a news conference afterward. In some cases, they couldn't access the vein, and in others they could but had concerns about vein quality. They attempted sites in his arms, legs, hands and feet. At one point, a medical team member left to gather more supplies.

The warden announced he was halting the execution at 10.58 am.

The corrections department said its death warrant for Creech would expire, and that it was considering next steps. While other medical procedures might allow for the execution, the state is mindful of the 8th Amendment's ban on cruel and unusual punishment, Tewalt said.

Creech's attorneys immediately filed a new motion for a stay in US District Court, saying "the badly botched execution attempt" proves the department's "inability to carry out a humane and constitutional execution." *—AP*

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S Korean docs face arrest if they don't end strike

SEOUL, 29 FEB

South Korea's government is threatening to take legal action against thousands of striking junior doctors and revoke their medical licences if they do not return to work on Thursday.

Around three quarters of the country's junior doctors have walked out of their jobs over the past week, causing disruption and delays to surgeries at major teaching hospitals. The trainee doctors are protesting government plans to admit drastically more medical students to university each year, to increase the number of doctors in the system.

South Korea has one of the lowest doctor-to-patient ratios among developed countries, and with a rapidly aging population, the government is warning there will be an acute shortage within a decade.

The empty corridors of St Mary's Hospital in Seoul this week gave a glimpse of what that future might look like. There was barely a doctor or patient to be seen in the triage area outside the emergency room, with patients warned to stay away. Ryu Ok Hada, a 25-year-old doctor, and his colleagues have not been to work at the hospital for over a week.

"It feels weird not getting up at 4 a.m.," Ryu joked. The junior doctor told the BBC he was used to working more than 100 hours a week, often for 40 hours without sleep. "It's insane how much we work for such little pay". *—BBC News*

Funds scandal: Japan PM to face ethics committee

TOKYO, 29 FEB

Prime Minister of Japan Fumio Kishida beleaguered Prime Minister renewed his apology over his governing party's corruption scandal, promising to not hold any more parties himself as leader during a political ethics committee Thursday.

Kishida has fought against plummeting support ratings since his governing party's corruption scandal rocked the government. The scandal, considered the biggest in decades, centres on political funds raised through party event tickets bought by individuals, companies and organisations. It led to 10 people — lawmakers and their aides — being indicted in January. *—AP*

Rupee settles flat at 82.91 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 29 FEB

The rupee on Thursday settled flat at 82.91 (provisional) against the US dollar, as the support from lower crude oil prices and a weak greenback against major crosses overseas was offset by sustained foreign capital outflows. Besides, a positive trend in equity markets provided a cushion to the domestic unit, forex traders said. Market participants were also cautious ahead of the domestic GDP data to be released later in the day, they added. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 82.88 and touched the intraday low of 82.94 against the greenback. The local unit finally settled at its previous day's closing level of 82.91 (provisional) against the dollar. On Wednesday, the rupee settled 2 paise lower at 82.91 against the US dollar. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, declined 0.19 per cent to 103.78. *—PTI*

Gold gains Rs 70; silver climbs Rs 200

NEW DELHI, 29 FEB

Gold prices rose by Rs 70 to Rs 62,970 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday in line with firm global trends, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at Rs 62,900 per 10 grams. Silver prices also climbed Rs 200 to Rs 74,100 per kg, while it had finished at Rs 73,900 per kg in the previous close. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 62,970 per 10 grams, up by Rs 70 from the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,034 per ounce, up by USD 5 from the previous close. Gold traded with a modest gain within a narrow range in the European trading session on Thursday, Gandhi said. Also, silver was quoting higher at USD 22.50 per ounce, while it had settled at USD 22.35 per ounce in the previous trade. *—PTI*

Shapoorji eyes Rs 500cr from 180 B'luru luxury units

BENGALURU, 29 FEB

Shapoorji Pallonji Real Estate on Thursday launched more than 180 luxury homes in Bengaluru with a revenue potential of around Rs 500 crore. The company said it has launched 'Sequoia', the last tower at its project Parkwest 2.0 in Binnypet, Bengaluru. The project Parkwest 2.0 has a total saleable area of over 18.4 lakh square feet. The company will develop over 180 luxury apartments in this last tower, having a saleable area of 4.3 lakh square feet and "presenting a revenue potential of nearly Rs 500 crore". As per the data compiled by housing brokerage firm, PropTiger, the sales of residential properties rose 44 per cent last year. *—PTI*

GPT Healthcare shares debut with over 16% premium

KOLKATA, 29 FEB

Shares of GPT Healthcare Ltd, which operates and manages mid-sized multi-specialty hospitals under the ILS Hospitals brand, listed with a premium of over 16 per cent on Thursday against the issue price of Rs 186. The stock made its debut at Rs 216.15, up 16.20 per cent on the BSE. Shares of the company later jumped 18.11 per cent to Rs 219.70. It listed at Rs 215, registering a gain of 15.59 per cent on the NSE. The company's market valuation stood at Rs 1,653.40 crore. The initial share sale of GPT Healthcare Ltd was subscribed 8.52 times on the final day of the offer on Monday. The price range for the offer was Rs 177-186 apiece. GPT Healthcare, founded by Dwarika Prasad Tantia, Om Tantia, and Shree Gopal Tantia, started with an eight-bed hospital in Kolkata in 2000. The company operates four full-service multi-specialty hospitals, with a total capacity of 561 beds. *—PTI*

Re-examine tax on digital good: India asks WTO

India is not in favour of taxes on e-commerce trade

ABU DHABI, 29 FEB

India and certain other developing nations are pushing to discuss the scope of the moratorium, as there are revenue implications due to this *PHOTO: ANI*

India on Thursday pitched for re-examination of the implications of the customs duties moratorium on e-commerce trade for developing and least developed member nations of the WTO.

India is not in favour of further continuation of the moratorium of customs duties on e-commerce trade as it is impacting developing countries.

The issue came up for discussion during a session of a work programme on e-commerce at the World Trade Organisation's 13th Ministerial Conference, which entered its last day on Thursday.

The e-commerce medium is a fast-growing segment for cross-border and domestic trade.

India said that this emerging segment of the global economy holds the promise for economic development and prosperity for developing countries, including the least developed countries (LDCs).

Due to this, New Delhi has stressed that all policy options, including the imposition of customs duties on e-commerce trade, should be available for the WTO members to promote digital industrialisation.

"With the digital revolution still unfolding and with increasing diffusion of technologies such as additive manufacturing and 3D printing, data analytics, artificial intelligence, Internet-of-Things etc., there was a need for re-examination of the implications of the moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions, particularly for the developing countries and the LDCs," the commerce ministry said.

Currently, a few firms based in developed countries dominate the global landscape of e-commerce.

"India explained that there was a huge digital chasm between the developed and the developing countries, which makes it challenging to increase the participation of developing countries in global e-commerce," the Ministry said.

The country also argued that developing countries need to focus on improving their domestic physical and digital infrastructure, creating supportive policy and regulatory frameworks, and developing digital capabilities.

India and certain other developing nations are pushing to discuss the scope of the moratorium, as there are revenue implications due to this.

As per estimates, the potential tariff revenue losses to the developing countries are about USD 10 billion every year. For India, it could be over USD 500 million every year.

World Trade Organisation members have agreed not to impose customs duties on electronic transmissions since 1998, and the moratorium has been periodically extended at successive ministerial conferences (MC), the highest decision-making body of the 166-member body. *—PTI*

AFTER RELIANCE DEAL

The 30-share BSE Sensex rebounded 195.42 points or 0.27 per cent to settle at 72,500.30 *PHOTO: ANI*

Sensex, Nifty close higher in volatile trade

MUMBAI, 29 FEB

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty closed with gains on Thursday in a highly volatile trade amid the scheduled monthly expiry of derivative contracts.

The 30-share BSE Sensex rebounded 195.42 points or 0.27 per cent to settle at 72,500.30. During the day, the benchmark oscillated between a high of 72,730.00 and a low of 72,099.32.

The broader Nifty of NSE gained 31.65 points or 0.14 per cent to close at 21,982.80.

Among Sensex shares, IndusInd Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, HCL Tech, Power Grid, Maruti, State Bank of India, Titan, Asian Paints, Nestle and UltraTech Cement were the major gainers.

Reliance Industries closed more than half a per cent higher after the company announced a proposed merger of media and entertainment assets of Viacom18 with Star India.

Hindustan Unilever, Bharti Airtel, Tata Motors, ITC, Tech Mahindra and Axis Bank were among the laggards. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled lower while Shanghai ended in the green. European markets were trading mostly in the green. The US markets ended marginally lower on Wednesday. "Domestic benchmark traded near a flat-line trend throughout the session, but some buoyancy emerged by the end of the day. Investors adopted a cautious wait & watch approach on the verge of a heavy economic data week," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services. *—PTI*

Reliance shares rise 2%

Shares of Reliance Industries on Thursday climbed nearly 2 per cent after Walt Disney Co and the firm announced the signing of binding pacts to merge their media operations in India to create a Rs 70,000 crore behemoth. The stock of the country's most valued firm in terms of market valuation climbed 1.68 per cent to Rs 2,958.

FDI inflows decline 13% to USD 32B in Apr-Dec 2023

NEW DELHI, 29 FEB

Foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows in India declined 13 per cent to USD 32.03 billion in April-December 2023, dragged down by lower infusion in computer hardware and software, telecom, auto, and pharma sectors, according to the latest government data.

FDI inflows stood at USD 36.74 billion during the corresponding nine months of the preceding fiscal.

Inflows during the October-December quarter of the current fiscal, however, rose by 18 per cent to USD 11.6 billion as against USD 9.83 billion during the same quarter of 2022-23.

The total FDI -- which includes equity inflows, reinvested earnings and other capital -- declined by about 7 per cent to USD 51.5 billion during the period under review against USD 55.27 billion in April-December 2022, the data from the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) showed.

During the nine-month period of this fiscal, FDI equity inflows decreased from major countries, including Singapore, the US, the UK, Cyprus and the UAE.

Investments fell significantly from the Cayman Islands and Cyprus to USD 215 million and USD 796 million, respectively, during April-December 2023 as against the two comparative figures of USD 624 million and USD 1.15 billion recorded in the year-ago period.

However, inflows increased from Mauritius, the Netherlands, Japan and Germany. *—PTI*

Govt predicts 30MT wheat output

NEW DELHI, 29 FEB

The target was fixed after deliberations with state food secretaries in a meeting *PHOTO: ANI*

The government has fixed a conservative target of wheat procurement in the range of 30-32 million tonnes during the 2024-25 rabi marketing season, according to the food ministry.

The lower target has been fixed despite the Ministry of Agriculture hoping for a record wheat production of 114-115 million tonnes in the 2023-24 crop year (July-June).

The target was fixed after deliberations with state food secretaries in a meeting chaired by Union Food Secretary Sanjeev Chopra in the national capital on Wednesday.

Apart from wheat, the Ministry has also fixed the target for paddy procurement in terms of rice for rabi season in the range of 9-10 million tonnes.

Besides, the government has set a procurement target of 6,00,000 tonnes for rabi coarse grains /millets (Shri Anna).

In the meeting, the Centre has asked states and Union Territories to focus on procurement of millets for diversification of crops and enhanced nutrition in dietary patterns.

In the 2023-24 season, the government procured about 26.2 million tonnes of wheat against the target of 34.15 million tonnes. In 2022-23, wheat procurement was only 18.8 million tonnes against the target of 44.4 million tonnes. The procurement was lower due to fall in production.

Recently, the food secretary had said the farmers' protest at the Punjab-Haryana borders is unlikely to impact the procurement operations.

Normally, the wheat procurement is carried out from April to March. However, this time, the Centre has decided to allow states to procure depending on the arrival of the crop. *—PTI*

Govt nod for ₹24K cr fertilisers subsidy

NEW DELHI, 29 FEB

The government on Thursday announced a Rs 24,420 crore subsidy on Phosphatic and Potassic (P&K) fertilisers for the kharif season and said the farmers will continue to get key soil nutrient DAP at Rs 1,350 per quintal.

Along with DAP (Di-ammonium Phosphate), the government asserted that retail prices of other major P&K fertilisers would remain stable.

The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the proposal of the Department of Fertilisers for fixing the Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS) rates for the kharif season 2024-25 (April 1 to September 30) on P&K fertilisers.

I&B Minister Anurag Thakur said the subsidy on Nitrogen (N) has been fixed at Rs 47.02 per kg, phosphatic (P) at Rs 28.72 per g, potassic (K) at Rs 2.38 per kg, and Sulphur (S) at Rs 1.89 per kg for 2024 kharif season, he said.

In fact, the subsidy on phosphatic fertilisers has been increased to Rs 28.72 per kg for the 2024 kharif season from Rs 20.82 per kg in the 2023 rabi season. However, the subsidy on nitrogen (N), potassic (K) and Sulphur (S) has been kept unchanged for 2024 kharif season.

He also said Muriate of Potash (MoP) will also continue to be available at Rs 1,670 per bag, while NPK will be available at Rs 1,470 per bag.

In order to reduce the import dependence on DAP, the cabinet also approved the inclusion of three new fertiliser grades under the NBS scheme. The subsidy would be provided to the fertiliser companies as per approved and notified rates so that fertilisers are made available to farmers at affordable prices. The government is making available 25 grades of P&K fertilisers to farmers at subsidised prices through fertiliser manufacturers/importers. The subsidy on P&K fertilisers is governed by the NBS scheme since 2010. *—PTI*

India key semiconductor player: Minister

PUNE, 29 FEB

India has made strides in the semiconductor sector in the last two years during which the government received investment proposals of Rs 2.50 lakh crore from global chip makers, Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar has said.

In the last 10 years, India has moved out of the league of 'Fragile Five' and become the world's fifth largest economy, the Minister of State for Electronics & Technology said.

Speaking at the 'Viksit Bharat Ambassador Meet' organised in Pune on Wednesday, Chandrasekhar said India has become a source of inspiration for countries across the world in terms of its inclusive policies. Chandrasekhar said that in 2022, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a semiconductor policy and it instantly attracted global attention. *—PTI*

NPCI, Greece sign deal to take UPI to Europe

NEW DELHI, 29 FEB

NPCI International Payments Limited (NIPL), a subsidiary of National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), and leading Greek bank Eurobank signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) towards enhancing cross-border payments using the UPI platform.

This announcement comes a week after Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis visited India, where he, among others, had a bilateral meeting with his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi.

As per the release, this initiative shall position Greece as one of the first European countries to enable the Indian diaspora residing in the country to undertake quick and seamless remittances to India using UPI rails. India, which has emerged as a leader in fintech innovation and Digital Public Infrastructure placed a strong emphasis on sharing its development experiences and innovation with partner countries. UPI is India's mobile-based fast payment system, which facilitates customers to make round-the-clock payments instantly, using a Virtual Payment Address (VPA) The UPI payment system has become hugely popular for retail digital payments in India, and its adoption is increasing at a rapid pace. In 2023, a record 100 billion transactions valued at Rs 2 trillion were made via UPI. *—PTI*

SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

AMAZON OFFERS NIGHT SHIFT OPPORTUNITIES TO WOMEN IN HARYANA

CHANDIGARH, 29 FEB

Amazon India on Thursday announced the launch of Women in Night Shifts (WINS) at one of its large sort centres in Haryana.

In addition to Amazon's existing initiatives, WINS is designed to provide a safe and supportive work environment for women, ensuring equal opportunities for both men and women to work in various shifts, and championing inclusivity for all, the company said.

In some states in India, regulations prohibit the employment of women in night shifts in warehousing operations facilities primarily stemming from concerns about women's safety and wellbeing.

PHOTO: PTI

Therefore, safety, security, and wellbeing take centre stage to enable the WINS initiative, the company said.

Amazon has engaged with state governments to advocate for equal work opportunities for all. The company has successfully enabled night shift operations for women at select sites in Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Karnataka. *—PTI*

EX-INTEL INDIA HEAD KILLED WHILE CYCLING

MUMBAI, 29 FEB

Former Intel India country head Avtar Saini was killed after a speeding cab hit him while he was cycling in Navi Mumbai township of Maharashtra, police said on Thursday.

The accident took place at around 5.50 am on Wednesday, when Saini,68, was riding a bicycle along with fellow cyclists on the Palm Beach Road in Nerul area, an official said.

The speeding cab hit Saini's bicycle from behind and the driver then tried to escape from the spot, with the bicycle's frame wedged under the front wheels of the cab, he said. Saini received injuries and the fellow cyclists rushed him to a hospital where he was declared dead on arrival, the official said. *—PTI*

Avtar Saini *PHOTO:X/@SJPATIL*

Musk's X to prioritise pinned post visibility

CALIFORNIA, 29 FEB

Elon Musk on Thursday announced a new user feature on his social media platform X.

Musk said the platform's recommendation algorithm will ensure that all of a user's followers see their pinned post every 48 hours.

As a failsafe to deter "gaming of the system," Musk also revealed that this will only apply for one pinned post every two days.

He added, "This only applies to one pinned post every 48 hours to prevent gaming of the system."

On 21 February, Musk posted on X, "When you pin a post, it is now automatically added to your highlights section. Soon, we will adjust the algorithm to prioritise showing pinned posts to your followers. This will only work once per day to prevent gaming of the system. *—ANI*

FLYER'S DEATH

Air India fined Rs 30 lakh over wheelchair row

NEW DELHI, 29 FEB

DGCA imposed a fine of Rs 30 lakh on Air India in connection with the incident of not providing wheelchair assistance to an 80-year-old passenger who collapsed and died after walking from the plane to the terminal in Mumbai airport.

The incident occurred on 12 February, upon the arrival of Air India flight AI-116 from New York. Patel, accompanied by his 76-year-old spouse, Narmadaben Patel, had booked two wheelchairs for assistance. However, upon disembarkation, only one wheelchair was available, leaving Patel to walk alongside his wife, who was aided by the lone wheelchair.

Accordingly, a financial penalty of Rs 30 lakh has been imposed on Air India as per Aircraft Rules, 1937, for violating the provisions of the aforementioned Civil Aviation Requirement (CAR) regulations.

Air India submitted its response on 20 February, 2024 *PHOTO: ANI*

An advisory has also been issued to all airlines to ensure that an adequate number of wheelchairs are available for passengers who require assistance while embarking or disembarking from the aircraft during their journey.

Air India submitted its response on 20 February, 2024, in which the airline informed that the elderly passenger opted to walk alongside his wife, who was also in a wheelchair, rather than wait for another wheelchair. The DGCA said that the airline failed to show compliance with the CAR as it did not provide wheelchair to the elderly passenger. *—ANI*

Rahul ruled out of 5th Test against Eng, Bumrah to rejoin

DHARAMSALA, 29 FEB

India batter KL Rahul has been ruled out of the fifth and final Test of the five-match series against England in Dharamsala, BCCI announced on Thursday.

Rahul is currently recovering from the injury and the BCCI Medical Team is closely monitoring him and coordinating with specialists in London for further management of his issue. BCCI also informed that star pacer Jasprit Bumrah, who was earlier released from the squad, will be rejoining the team in Dharamsala for the fifth Test.

"Jasprit Bumrah who was released from the squad for the 4th Test in Ranchi, will link up with the squad in Dharamsala for the 5th Test," stated BCCI in a release.

KL Rahul **PHOTO: PTI**

Jasprit Bumrah **PHOTO: PTI**

"Washington Sundar has been released from the squad. He will join Tamil Nadu - his Ranji Trophy side - for their Ranji Trophy Semi-final fixture against Mumbai, starting March 2nd, 2024. He will join the India squad after the completion of the domestic fixture for the fifth Test if need be," stated further.

The BCCI also stated that star pacer Mohammed Shami, who underwent surgery on Monday, will soon head to the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru to commence his rehabilitation process.

India's updated squad for the 5th Test: Rohit Sharma (C), Jasprit Bumrah (VC), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Rajat Patidar, Sarfaraz Khan, Dhruv Jurel (WK), KS Bharat (WK), Devdutt Padikkal, R Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohd. Siraj, Mukesh Kumar, Akash Deep.

—PTI

- India batter KL Rahul has been ruled out of the fifth and final Test of the five-match series against England in Dharamsala, BCCI announced on Thursday.

Even Rohit, Kohli should play domestic cricket: Kirti Azad

Azad felt that penalizing just Ishan and Iyer wasn't right

NEW DELHI, 29 FEB

Member of the 1983 World Cup-winning team Kirti Azad on Thursday backed the BCCI's directive for cricketers to play the Ranji Trophy, saying it's a good move and the rule should apply to every India team player, including Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli.

The out-of-favour duo of Ishan Kishan and Shreyas Iyer were excluded from the list of centrally-contracted players after they ignored the directive to play Ranji Trophy.

"It (directive) is a very good move. Everybody should be playing Ranji Trophy cricket, but currently, the emphasis is on the IPL. It is good, and it is entertaining but the real cricket is the (five) days' cricket. Playing in domestic cricket is good, it keeps you in touch.

"But whenever you are free, even if you're a Rohit Sharma or a Virat Kohli, you should go back and play domestic cricket for the state. That (state) allowed you to be a player, get selected, and then play for the country.

He felt that penalizing just Ishan and Iyer wasn't right.

"Just to penalize the two is not correct, I think everybody should be penalized. Everybody should be seen with the same mirror," Azad told PTI Video.

Azad declined to comment on whether this was the potential end of the road for Ishan and Iyer after their names were excluded from the list of centrally contracted players.

"My question is, are they playing enough domestic cricket? They are playing T20 cricket, nowadays and every other state has a T20 cricket league. Back in the days when we were starting our careers, players like Bishan Singh Bedi, Madan Lal, Surinder Amarnath, Mohinder Amarnath, Chetan Chauhan, Sunil Gavaskar, Sandeep Patil, Karsan Ghavri played alongside youngsters like me and Ravi Shastri.

"All these senior Test team players would play for their sides, would play for the pride of their state which seems missing in the youngsters nowadays," he added.

He questioned why Indian players had issues playing domestic cricket while England cricketers willingly played county cricket when not on the national side.

—PTI

Kirti Azad **PHOTO: PTI**

Rohit Sharma **PHOTO: PTI**

Virat Kohli **PHOTO: PTI**

Irfan questions denial of contracts to Iyer, Kishan

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

Former India pacer Irfan Pathan has questioned the BCCI's decision to deny central contracts to Ishan Kishan and Shreyas Iyer for ignoring a diktat to play Ranji Trophy, saying that players like Hardik Pandya have not been judged on the same parameter. Pandya, who has not featured in Tests since 2018, secured a place in Grade A.

—PTI

Smriti Mandhana plays a shot during a Women's Premier League (WPL) 2024 **PHOTO: PTI**

DC brave Smriti blitz to beat RCB by 25 runs

BENGALURU, 29 FEB

Delhi Capitals braved a sensational battering from Smriti Mandhana to hand a fighting Royal Challengers Bangalore a 25-run defeat in their Women's Premier League match here on Thursday.

Mandhana fused power and grace to score 74 (43b, 10x4, 3x6) but other batters did not quite make it big as Royal Challengers, who were without indisposed star all-rounder Elysse Perry, ended up at 169 for nine.

The Capitals made a challenging 194 for five as Shafali Varma mustered a 31-ball 50 after they were asked to bat first.

But that total was under severe threat when Mandhana tore into the DC attack with panache.

They energetically went off the blocks as Mandhana took it upon herself the task of leading her side's reply.

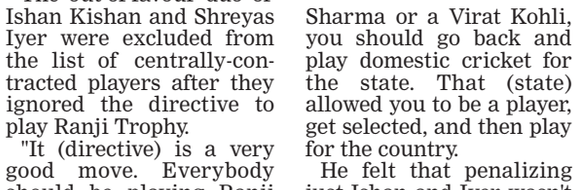
She started with two fours off pacer Marizanne Kaap (2/38) and the left-hander only stepped up on the aggression from that point.

Mandhana faced 28 balls in the Power Play segment and hammered 45 runs as the home team reached an impressive 52 for no loss after six overs.

Sophie Devine just had to watch all the fun from her end as Mandhana reached her first-ever WPL fifty in just 32 balls when she took a quick two off off-spinner Minnu Mani.

Devine too had her moments like when she moussed two successive sixes off Minnu, one each over long-on and mid-wicket.

—PTI



Ankita Raina **PHOTO: PTI**

Ankita, Sahaja in quarters of ITF

GURUGRAM, 29 FEB

India's Ankita Raina and Sahaja Yamplapalli registered straight-game wins to advance to the quarterfinals of the ITF Women's Open here on Thursday.

Second seed Ankita beat an error-prone Zeel Desai 7-6(4) 6-3, while fifth seed Sahaja overcame stiff resistance from wild card entrant Riya Bhatia before beating her 7-6(8) 7-5 in the pre-quarterfinals.

Two other Indians who played the last 16 -- Rashmikaa Srivalli Bhamidipaty and Vaishnavi Adkar -- bowed out but not before staging a brilliant fight against their seeded opponents.

While Srivalli lost to seventh seed Jacqueline Cabaj Awad of Sweden 1-6 6-3 7-6(5), Vaishnavi was shown the door by top seed Dalila Jakupovic of Slovenia 6-7(1) 3-6.

Later, Riya joined hands with Michika Ozeki of Japan to upset the third-seeded pair of Anastasia Gasanova and Ekaterina Yashina 6-4 6-4 to enter the doubles semi-finals.

Ankita also made it to the last four alongside her Kazakh partner Zhibek Kulambayeva, beating the all-Japanese pair of Akiko Omae and Ikumi Yamazaki 7-5 7-6(9).

Ankita, currently India's No.1 women's player, broke Zeel's serve early in the second game to wrest the initiative.

—PTI

Daniil Medvedev maintains mastery, reaches Dubai semis

DUBAI, 29 FEB

Daniil Medvedev is two wins away from defending an ATP title for the first time, defeating Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, 6-2, 6-3 to reach the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships semifinals.

The top seed won the first completed match of the day after the first two quarterfinals ended in retirements for Andrey Rublev and Alexander Bublik, winning a fourth straight match against the eighth-seeded Davidovich Fokina in one hour and 18 minutes on Center Court.

Though Medvedev had never lost to Davidovich Fokina in three previous meetings, two of the three had gone three sets—including a face-off in Rotterdam last February—and the former world No. 1 was fresh off a tricky three-setter against Lorenzo Sonego on Wednesday.

Medvedev trailed the in-form Italian by a break before rallying to reach the quarterfinals, where Davidovich Fokina was waiting after outlasting an injured Jakub Mensik in the Round of 16.

After admitting to nerves against Sonego, Medvedev appeared fully dialed in against his Spanish opposition, coming alive from 2-2 in the opening set and breaking serve with an impressive foray to the net. In full flow, he got to set point behind a powerful overhead and put himself a set from the semis after Davidovich Fokina netted a low volley.

—AP

Daniil Medvedev **PHOTO: ANI**

Ronaldo was suspended for one match for 'provoking' fans with a gesture

DUBAI, 29 FEB

Saudi Arabia's football governing body on Thursday suspended Cristiano Ronaldo for one game over a gesture he made on the pitch last weekend that was judged a "provocation". The Saudi Arabian Football Federation said the Al-Nassr captain and former Porto star was also fined a total of 30,000 riyals ($8,000) for the move, which broke rules against provoking the public during a match. The decision cannot be appealed. Video emerged after his side's 3-2 win against Al-Shabab showing Ronaldo making a repeated thrusting gesture towards his groin in response to crowds taunting him by chanting the name of his longtime rival, Lionel Messi.

—AP

Ronaldo gestures towards the Al-Shabab fans **PHOTO: X**

Mbappe is no longer untouchable as PSG prepares for CL return

LONDON, 29 FEB

Kylian Mbappe will face former club Monaco for the final time as a Paris Saint-Germain player on Friday, provided coach Luis Enrique selects his star player. The France captain's relationship with the PSG boss has come under the spotlight with Mbappe discovering he is no longer assured of a place in the line-up since telling the Qatar-owned club he would leave at the end of this season. Mbappe informed PSG in mid-February that he intended to depart when his contract expires in June, after seven years at the Parc des Princes, with Real Madrid his likely next destination.

Luis Enrique responded to that by leaving the 25-year-old on the bench for their next game at Nantes, although Mbappe came on to score a penalty in a 2-0 win.

More surprisingly, Mbappe started last week's home meeting with Rennes and wore the captain's armband in the absence of Marquinhos, but was substituted on 65 minutes.

Trailing 1-0 at the time, PSG came back to draw thanks to a penalty won and converted by his replacement, Goncalo Ramos.

PSG's all-time top scorer with 244 goals, Mbappe has rarely started on the bench in 292 appearances since signing from Monaco in 2017.He has occasionally been substituted earlier than was the case last weekend, but always either due to injury or with PSG already winning.

—AP

Kylian Mbappe **PHOTO: ANI**

Green hits 103 on opening day of first Test

WELLINGTON, 29 FEB

Cameron Green hit a defiant unbeaten 103 as Australia were restricted to 279-9 on the opening day of the first Test in New Zealand.Matt Henry (4-43) claimed four wickets as the home side's seam attack took full advantage of a green wicket in Wellington.

Henry claimed the wickets of openers Steve Smith (31) and Usman Khawaja (33) as Australia limped to 89-4 with the struggling Marnus Labuschagne and Travis Head both managing just a single.

Mitchell Marsh provided some support to Green, handed the pivotal number four spot after Smith's elevation to open following the retirement of David Warner before Henry had him caught behind for 40. Green hit 16 boundaries in his second Test century. Australia 279 for 9 (Green 103*, Marsh 40, Henry 4-43) vs New Zealand—*AP*

PHOTO: IANS

Praggu commits blunder, loses second round

PRAGUE, 29 FEB

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa committed a time-pressure blunder as he suffered defeat at the hands of Parham Maghsoodloo of Iran in the second round of the Prague Masters Chess tournament here. The defeat ended Praggnanandhaa's impressive 47-game unbeaten streak in Classical Chess.The 18-year-old Praggnanandhaa also lost the top ranking in live ratings among Indians -- a spot reclaimed by the legendary Viswanathan Anand who is also the brand ambassador of this event.

—AP

PHOTO: IANS

Randhawa starts with 69, lies 51st in NZ

QUEENSTOWN, 29 FEB

Veteran Indian golfer Jyoti Randhawa, who plans to divide his time between the Asian Tour and Legends European Tour, got off to a decent start at the New Zealand Open, carding a two-under 69 in the opening round here on Thursday.The 50-year-old Indian, who is a former Asian Tour No. 1, was placed Tied-51st after the first round.*—AP*

PHOTO: IANS

PHOTO: PTI

Athletes in country to be issued digital certificates:Thakur

NEW DELHI, 29 FEB

Sports minister Anurag Thakur on Thursday announced that the government will issue digital certificates to registered athletes across the country, a move which would ensure a transparent account of their participation and performance.

The digital certificate will have dates of the athletes' participation in competitions and serve as proof of their achievements."With athletes at the heart of our progressing and growing sporting ecosystem, the sports ministry has made a crucial decision to promote the 'issuance of digital certificates to athletes'.*—PTI*

MOVES COURT AGAINST SELECTION

Bajrang refuses to appear in trials under WFI

NEW DELHI, 29 FEB

Rejecting the Wrestling Federation of India's invitation to compete in the upcoming national trials, ace Indian wrestler Bajrang Punia has moved an urgent joint petition in the Delhi High Court, seeking a stay on the selection competition here on 10-11 March.

It has been learned from reliable sources that Bajrang, Vinesh Phogat, Sakshi Malik, and her husband Satywart Kadiyan moved the court on Wednesday and the matter will be heard on Friday.

While Bajrang did not confirm filing a petition, he questioned the government's silence on the issues concerning Indian wrestling.

The Indian team for the Asian Wrestling Championships Olympic Qualifier in Kyrgyzstan next month will be selected based on the trials at Delhi's IG Stadium.

Bajrang told PTI from Russia, where he has been training for the last two months, that he has spent a fortune abroad but he won't compete in trials if they are conducted by the Sanjay Singh-led WFI.

"I would not spend Rs 30 lakh on my training if I were to not compete in the trials, but how the suspended WFI is conducting the trials? I don't get what the government's compulsion is (on allowing WFI to conduct trials)?" Bajrang said.

"I don't understand how a sports body suspended by the Indian government issues a circular and announces the trials. Why is the government silent? We will appear in the trials only if the ad-hoc panel or the government conducts it. How can a suspended body announce the trials?" he asked. WFI president Sanjay Singh had appealed to the protesting wrestlers to forget the past and appear for the trials.

The trio had led a prolonged protest at Jantar Mantar, demanding the arrest of then WFI president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, whom they had accused of sexual harassment. "This decision to not appear in trials is a joint decision taken by us. We are together in this," he said. PTI tried to reach out to Sakshi and Vinesh for confirmation but the former did not return calls and the latter could not be contacted. Asked specifically if they have moved court against the trials, Bajrang denied the development but a source in the WFI confirmed to PTI that four wrestlers have approached the Delhi High Court.

The United World Wrestling (UWW) lifted the suspension on the WFI earlier this month but the government, which had also suspended the National Sports Federation (NSF) for flouting rules, has not yet made such a decision.

Sakshi has already announced her retirement while Vinesh, one of the most decorated Indian wrestlers, made a winning comeback to competitive wrestling by winning gold at the Nationals in Jaipur earlier this month.

—PTI

Bajrang Punia is currently in Russia for training **PHOTO: X**

- Rejecting the Wrestling Federation of India's invitation to compete in the upcoming national trials, ace Indian wrestler Bajrang Punia has moved an urgent joint petition in the Delhi High Court, seeking a stay on the selection competition here on 10-11 March.